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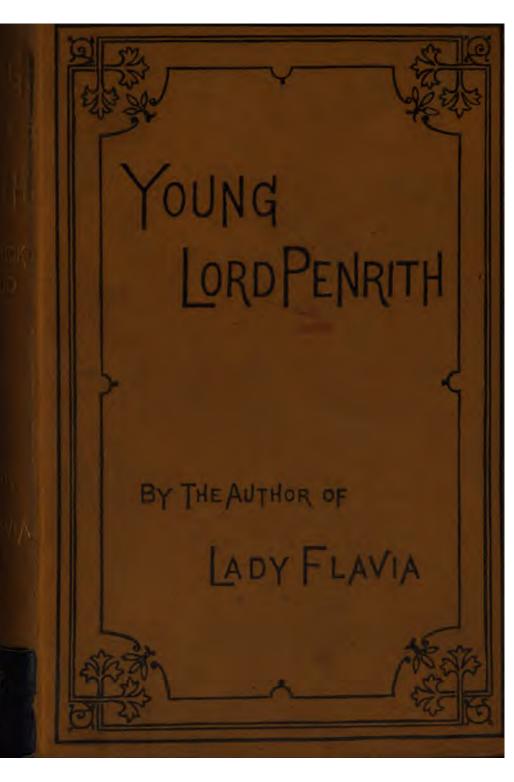
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## YOUNG LORD PENRITH.

VOL. I.

# YOUNG LORD PENRITH

BY

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"LADY FLAVIA," "LORD LYNN'S WIFE," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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## YOUNG LORD PENRITH.

## CHAPTER I.

### IT GROWS DARK.

"A LONE? Why, father, you surely did not let them go alone, the boys and the young lady, in our boat, with a storm-cloud on Moel Vawr that will lash the lake into a sheet of foam when it breaks! If so——" And then came a pause, as the speaker, who had come hurrying up in breathless haste along the rugged reef of slippery rocks that stretched out like

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VOL. I.

a narrow promontory into the lake, shaded his eyes with his hand, and looked intently out over the expanse of sun-lit waters, now rippling as the breeze freshened.

"I did," said the elder of the two men, as in his turn he strained his eyes to gaze over the glittering lake; "and, if harm comes of it, heaven forgive me! for I feel now that I was to blame."

And yet it was a lovely scene on which they looked; for the blue sky overhead, almost Italian in its violet depth of hue, was mirrored in the bright waters of Bala Lake; while the Welsh mountains wore their gayest garb—moss, and turf, and heather, and lichens blending their green and gold, and purple, to contrast with the bare crags and ghastly scaurs that were strewed with crumbling shale and loose

stones, amid which even the hill-fox could scarcely pick his way. Every glen, every cleft, each tiny thread of trickling water, could be seen with unusual distinctness; while the majestic peaks to the northward stood out bold and well defined in sharp relief against the horizon. Over one huge mountain that towered aloft, the giant sentinel of the vale, floated a misty cloud of blackening vapour.

"Moel Vawr," said the younger of the two boatmen, pointing towards it, "does not wear his cap for nothing. But they are blind to it yonder." And again he looked out over the sun-lit sparkling waters, already heaving, as the wind increased, towards the pretty pinnace, with her white sail and fluttering crimson flag, that was the only craft in sight. Far away on the left,

nestling among trees and green meadows, were the white walls and slated roofs of the village; while nearer to the rude landing-stage, beside which were heaped cartloads of rough ore awaiting transport to the smelting-works, stood the solitary cottage of the boatmen. These two, father and son, were very unlike to one another, save for that indefinable something which we often observe to make an outward and visible link between those who are near in blood. The elder was sickly, bent, and with haggard features, and hair prematurely grey. The younger, fair, blue-eyed, and strikingly handsome. Englishmen who come to Wales to earn a living there are not always very popular; but Hugh Ashton was liked and respected, somehow, far and wide, from Bettws y Coed and

Pllwnt to Beddgelert; and, for the sake of the frank, bold lad, people were tolerant to his silent, sad-eyed father.

It needed a sailor's eye, or that of a mountaineer, to note the first signs of the impending change of weather. First the topmost peak of Moel Vawr assumed that cloud-cap which the hill-folk, with lambs grazing far afield, or corn half-stacked, regarded as a warning worth attention. Then there came, creeping from above, grey patches of cloud-mist that clung to the copse, and lurked in the hollow, and filled the gorge, like an ambushed foe waiting to break from his ambuscade when the battle should begin. Next the wind swept in fitful gusts over vale and lake, and threads of vapour spanned the sky, and the other mountains put on each his cowl of storms,

as if in obedience to the signal given by Moel Vawr; and the sigh of the breeze became a sob, and the sob a shriek, and presently the veriest tyro could see that mischief was brewing.

The cattle were running to and fro, lowing uneasily in the fields, and the pigeons had fluttered homeward, and the rooks flapped past with hurrying wing and complaining caw, and farming men were hastening to the more exposed uplands, where live-stock or ill-built haystacks might need protection.

"Nhule ar pen monith!" called out one of the shepherds, pointing upwards at the mountain top with its blackening veil of clouds, as he passed the reef of rocks on which the Ashtons stood. The latter made

no reply, but gazed with painful intentness at the distant boat.

"They are going about now," said the elder man, with somewhat of a sigh of relief. "They have seen the signs of a storm, and may perhaps get to shore in time."

"No, no!" answered Hugh, as his quick glance was cast upward to the darkening sky. "In five minutes, at most, the squall will be upon them. Look at that flapping sail, and see how the boat dances already on the waves; and no hand upon the rudder but the weak one of a boy!"

Meanwhile, those in the boat had perceived, though somewhat late, the threatening portents of the approaching tempest.

They were but three in number: two boys,

the elder of whom was, perhaps, fourteen years of age, and a beautiful girl some five years older.

"We'll put the boat about at once, and get back before the rain comes on," said the bigger of the two boys, with the sanguine confidence that belongs to youth alone.—"Look sharp with the rudder, Willie, while I ease off the sheet a bit.—There's no danger, Cousin Maud, of anything worse than a wetting, I do assure you."

Yet the pinnace, as she came slowly round in answer to the helm, heeled ominously, and a shower of spray flew over her bows as she laboured among the glassy waves that were rising fast. A dark curtain seemed to have suddenly been drawn across the sun-gilded azure of the sky, and

the crystal waters of the lake wore a sullen, leaden hue, streaked with white froth.

"We ought to lose no time, Edgar, in returning to shore," said the girl, in a tone that she vainly tried to render steady and unconcerned. "These mountain lakes, I have heard, are treacherous. Surely we ought to go back."

"Not a bit of danger!" replied Edgar, as he hauled at the wet rope, casting an eager look upwards to the blackening canopy of cloud. "Why, cousin, I've been out with the fishermen fifty times on the Cornish coast when it really did blow great-guns, and then to think of this little lake —— Steady, Willie, steady! We shipped too much water that time!" as a drenching shower of spray broke over

the reeling boat, and the sky wore its darkest frown, and the shriek of the wind grew bodingly shrill. The pinnace heeled over under the force of the blast; but she righted, and fought a good fight, riding gallantly over the white waves. Far and near, nothing could be seen save inky sky and angry water. The foaming billows rose menacingly, as if to bar the path; and, on the dim shore-line, blotted and blurred by the driving rain, miniature breakers could be vaguely descried.

"They'll run her, stem on, against the Lion Rock," cried young Hugh Ashton, pointing to a great weed-grown stone protruding from the water not far from the reef, and which derived its name from some fancied resemblance to the head

and shoulders of the King of Beasts. "Quick, father, now, to help when the boat goes to pieces!"

Crash! The sound of the shattered woodwork could be heard even above the roar of the gale, as now the pinnace struck upon the Lion Rock, and nothing of her could be seen but a confused medley of broken timber and drooping mast, and human forms half-submerged, and the white foam that rose up all around like a spotless shroud. Then came a splash, followed by another, as the boatmen, father and son, plunged boldly into the water to render aid.

"Save Willie—Willie can't swim!" gasped out Edgar, as the elder Ashton approached. "I shall do well enough. Where's Cousin Maud?" Maud was in better keeping than

that of her stripling kinsman. Hugh Ashton was a powerful swimmer, and he had seemed to tear the lake-waves asunder in the force of the swift, strong strokes that brought him to where the sinking girl's loosened hair floated on the surface. As she felt his grasp upon her, and felt her head raised above the cruel water, she clung to him with the blind instinct of the drowning, and for a moment both sank.

"Don't be afraid, young lady; and hold me, but not so firmly. I want to swim my best now," panted Hugh, as he battled with the waves. "Let your head rest on my shoulder—so; and now leave it all to me."

Just then the lightning flashed forth from the riven clouds, and the roll of heaven's artillery was echoed back from gorge and glen, from cairn and cave, filling the startled air with deep and threatening sound. And then again flared forth the lightning; while the lake boiled and seethed like a witch's caldron, and overhead the gloomy sky stretched like a funeral pall.

## CHAPTER II.

#### ONE LOST.

A S the storm burst upon the lake, a car came rattling down the mountain road that wound serpent-wise from the valley to the hill-pass, and thus its occupants were in a manner eye-witnesses of the shipwreck of the pinnace. Not that they saw the disaster in its completeness. Theirs was, in accordance with the nature of things, not a full view, but a tantalising, almost maddening glimpse from the corners of the winding road, as successive twists

brought them down from the steep slopes to the dead level of the lake-side. There was the pretty white-sailed boat battling for life against the squall; there were the curling waves; there the blackness of the sky; there the vivid glare of the lightning.

"For any sake, man, get along! Flog the old screw, can't you?" called out the solitary passenger, in tones of unwonted excitement. The Cymrian driver needed no urging to make him ply the whip-thong and jerk the rein. He was standing up as he drove, with dilated eyes and pale face. So was his temporary employer, eager and anxious too, for once; for his quick eye had made out who were those on board the pinnace.

Then came one of those provoking turns

in the road, and when the lake was again visible the pinnace was gone, and nothing remained but a heap of shattered woodwork, and a sail half sunk, and some human forms dimly descried. Another turn, and yet another, and then, amidst blinding flashes and crashing thunder-peals, and a continuous downpour of such heavy rain as thunder alone, and in a mountain district, can bring with it, the car reached lake and landing-stage.

"'Deed, sir, it is a bad job," said the driver, as he sprang to earth. "Ashton's was a clever boat, indeed she was, but she's to pieces now, and unless we can—"

The words were lost in the shriek of the gale and the savage growl of the thunder. Over the very planks of the primitive landing-place the spray broke in showers, and the reef was half hidden by whirling drift and lashing rain. In the midst of the angry water appeared a stalwart figure, that of Hugh the boatman, wading shorewards, and carrying in his arms the almost lifeless form of Maud. The girl's head rested droopingly on his strong shoulder, and her long brown hair streamed loosely as he fought his way to land. Some distance off, and beside the weed-grown mass of the Lion Rock, could be yet distinguished the wreck of the pinnace; and nearer to the reef could be seen the younger boy clinging to an oar, while a swimmer, readily recognized as the elder of the two Ashtons, was in the act of aiding him to reach a sheltered nook among the storm-beaten stones, whence it was practicable for Willie slowly to scramble,

10

dripping and scared, up the rocky barrier.

Edgar, the bigger and bolder of the two boys, had already gained the beach. Fortune had befriended him; while Maud's rescuer, caught in a current that ran rapidly southwards, keeping him and her, as such currents will, in the wash of the broken water, had had need of all his strength and skill to enable him thus encumbered to reach the shore.

"Well done, Hugh Ashton, gallantly done!" cried out the driver of the car. "Sassenach or not, a braver boy never trod our Welsh ground; and that's as true as that my name's Owen Owen."

His passenger, who had long since alighted, now stepped forward, a smile upon his lips, and said, blandly, "I have to thank you, Mr.—Ashton, I believe, for saving my

relation here, Miss Stanhope. You are a brave fellow, and I can assure you, in Lady Larpent's name, that your gallant conduct shall not go unrewarded."

Something in the tone there was, or it may be in the words, which grated on the boatman's ear.

"I look for no reward, sir," he said, as he aided in placing Maud, whose consciousness now began to return, among the cushions of the car. And then the eyes of the two young men met. In person, as in station, they offered a marked contrast to one another.

Hugh Ashton, in his rough working clothes, with his flushed fair face, his golden hair, and dauntless blue eyes, was very much taller, handsomer, and of a manlier presence than the undersized gentleman

who confronted him. And yet that other, though slightly built and in stature below the middle height, was far from being in-He was older significant in appearance. than Hugh, being, it might be guessed, at least eight or nine and twenty years of age: and his keen face was quite pale, almost white, and seemed yet more pallid, since his hair was so very dark and his long black eyes so bright. He was well dressed, somewhat too carefully so, perhaps, for a tour in Wales, or for a fishing excursion such as was denoted by the rods, fly-books, and landing-net on the floor of the car; wore glistening rings on his white fingers; and had a subtle atmosphere, as of daintiest essences, always floating vaguely about him. There was a languid elegance in his bearing -though he could be prompt enough, and even fierce enough, when he chose—which matched well with the indolent drawl of his half-careless voice. These two men, idler and toiler, rich and poor, were certainly very unlike.

The elder boy, Edgar, now came hurrying up.

"It was my fault, every bit of it, Lucius," he cried out, with all a boy's fervour of self-condemnation; "and but for these brave fellows—— This, Hugh, is my brother, Sir Lucius Larpent," he added, by way of explanation; "you haven't seen him before, because he only joined us yesterday at the hotel yonder.—Well, it was all my doing, as I said, since I persuaded Maud to go in the boat, and persuaded Ashton to—— O, look, look!" shrieked out the boy, suddenly, as his eyes lit on the lake,

and he clutched Hugh by the arm as he bent over Maud, still helpless. "Look! Your father!"

And Hugh, starting, saw a group of men, one of whom bore a coil of rope, advancing from the village at a run, having been somehow made cognisant—for ill news flies fast—of the accident to the pinnace; saw, too, young Willie Larpent on the rocky reef, calling aloud and pointing with extended finger to something in the water beneath, and divined rather than learned the worst.

What had happened was briefly this: Little Willie, washed clear away from the broken boat, and unable to swim, would have been drowned before rescue could reach him, had he not caught hold of an oar as it drifted past, and so kept afloat

until the elder boatman neared him. George Ashton himself swam well, but he was a spare, slightly-made man, and it was all that he could do to tow young Willie and his oar through the breakers to a place where the child's hand could fasten itself upon a jutting angle of the reef, up which rough and slippery wall he slowly made his way to a place of safety.

To aid his son, still doing manful battle with the lake-waves for Maud's sake and his own, was George Ashton's next impulse, and with this object he struck out afresh; but scarcely had he got beyond the sunken rocks and into the deep water, before he felt an icy hand contract upon his throbbing heart, a strange feebleness benumb his stiffening limbs, and, with one unheard half-uttered cry for succour, down he went be-

neath the heaving waters! He rose, and with haggard eyes he gazed around him, and tried to call aloud, but failed, and marvelled not at the failure, since he knew that the swimmer's fellest foe, cramp, the true water-kelpie of many a superstitious legend, had him in his grip, and that, in default of help, death was very near. And then he sank.

Three bounds, and Hugh was at the water's edge, and about to plunge, when a firm though friendly grasp restrained him. "Not without a rope—no, indeed!" said the good-natured fisherman who held him fast. "Once is quite enough, indeed, on such a day, but not twice.—Evans, Jones, Roberts! Give a hand, men!"

Hugh struggled to be free, but his wellwishers prevailed, and when at length they suffered him to breast the waters, it was with a tough rope around his body, by means of which, baffled and breathless, he was presently hauled to shore. Again he tried, and again, spent and weary, he was drawn to land. Of George Ashton there was not a trace. The scattered fragments of the boat had drifted far to leeward. Of the missing man nothing could be seen.

Meanwhile, the car-driver, scrambling along the reef, had aided Willie to reach the firm land and flat road; while Miss Stanhope, who had partly recovered from the chill and shock, was able to ask feebly whether "anything was wrong—anyone—" She did not finish the sentence, but Sir Lucius, her cousin, completed it for her.

"Come to grief?" he said, in a tone that jarred on Maud's more sensitive ear, but which yet expressed nothing but the serene indifference of an easy-going man of the world. "Well, yes, I'm afraid so. It is the owner of the pleasure-boat, who swam—"

"What — that poor Ashton — Hugh's father!" exclaimed Miss Stanhope, raising herself in the car so as to gain a better view, through rain and scud, of the bustle on the quay.

"Hugh's father, if Hugh, as I conjecture, is the boatman who brought you ashore," returned Sir Lucius, imperturbably. "I fear the poor man is——"

"Not dead?" interrupted the girl, half incredulously. "Surely not dead—dead, and in trying to save us!" And then, as

the blank gaunt horror of the truth rose up before her, she broke into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Now, Maud, don't distress yourself, I beg," said her kinsman, more affected himself by a young lady's tears than by the event which had caused them. "You are weak and wet, and very cold, and must get back to the hotel at once, or you will be ill; and my mother will never forgive herself for having—"

"Never mind me!" murmured Maud.

"It seems so selfish to be intent on my own comfort while a man who risked his life for Willie and me is perishing almost before our eyes."

The baronet had common sense on his side of the argument, and he urged accordingly that no good, and much harm, could

result from Miss Stanhope's remaining, in such weather and in her wet garments, by the lake-side. There were the boys, too, drenched and chilled, with chattering teeth and bluish complexions, who would no doubt be the better, as Sir Lucius pointed out, of brandy-and-water, blankets, and dry clothes at the inn. Willie, the youngest, came reluctantly up to the car in obedience to his brother's peremptory summons, his knuckles screwed into his eyes.

"Poor, dear, good old George!" he whimpered. "He was so gentle and patient, rigging us little ships, and telling us about the sea and abroad, and the islands he had sailed to. And then to drown like that!"

Edgar, as he, too, was recalled from the quay, shook his head.

"They can't find him. And Hugh's half mad," he piteously exclaimed.

Sir Lucius Larpent drummed with one white bejewelled finger on the outer rail of the car somewhat irritably. Sentimental regrets and gushing enthusiasm he identified with cheap newspapers and popular preachers, and each and all of these set his exquisite teeth on edge. But when Maud slowly said, "It is shocking! I should like to thank young Mr. Ashton, and to say—how much I feel—how sorry——"Sir Lucius, after a well-expressed word or two of consolation, went with the best possible grace to the wharf, and soon returned.

"He cannot attend now, Maud," said the baronet, "to you or to me. Poor fellow! We must give his sorrow time to calm itself.

—Here, Owen, catch hold of the reins, my

lad," he added more briskly to the driver following at his heels. "And you boys, jump in! Lucky that the drive is a short one." And off rolled the car through rain and mist towards the village.

Maud Stanhope might not impossibly have felt indignant had she been aware that, when her urbane cousin assured her of Hugh's inability or unwillingness to speak with her, Sir Lucius was drawing on his imagination for the facts. The baronet had mingled with the groups on the landing-stage—for by this time there was quite a little crowd upon the wharf—and had asked a common-place question or two, but to Hugh he had addressed never a word.

The younger Ashton was, in truth, quite unconscious of the disappearance of the family party or of the driving off of the

Stupefied with grief and spent carriage. with toil, he lingered at the water's edge, heedless of the rain, heedless, too, of more than one bruise received among the rocks, or of the cut which some splinter of the pinnace had inflicted on his right wrist, from which a few drops of blood were slowly trickling. Those around him were not sparing of rough kindness; but their well-meant words of comfort were scarcely heard. Still, amidst the heavy rain and the dying sounds of the now receding thunder, Hugh Ashton continued to strain his eyes so as to scan the surface of the lake: and it was with difficulty and after long delay that the friendly Welshmen who surrounded him were able to draw him away from the fatal spot, promising that, as soon as the storm should abate and a boat be brought round, a renewed search should be undertaken for the body of George Ashton.

## CHAPTER III.

## IN THE "ROYAL CAMBRIAN."

TALES, like Switzerland, and most other picturesque regions easy of access, can boast of good hotels, and of these the "Royal Cambrian," built by a speculative company of confiding shareholders and adventurous directors, was undoubtedly one of the biggest. The stately structure, overbuilt if undermanned, may or may not have returned a satisfactory dividend for the capital sunk in its construction. But, at any rate, it contained handsome suites of VOL. I. D

rooms, at the disposal of guests with long purses, and of these one of the handsomest was that occupied by, according to the hotel books, "The Hon. (Dowager) Lady Larpent and party."

The family group consists of the Dowager herself, of Sir Lucius, her son, of the younger brothers, Edgar and Willie, and of her niece, Maud Stanhope. A grand comeliness, or a comely grandeur, yet belongs, despite the touch of Time, to the majestic Lady Larpent. A fine woman she had been pronounced when fresh from boarding-school; and such, in the autumn of her days, she still is, large, well-dressed, and with an expression of imperious goodnature. An English crowd, waiting in eager-eyed expectancy for the first glimpse of a coming Empress or Archduchess, would

have been certain to raise the cry of "Here she is!" on catching sight of Lady Larpent, so exactly did her mien and bearing chime in with the popular idea of an exalted personage.

And yet Sophia Larpent—she had had a Royal Highness, but of a sadly distant date, as sponsor at her splendid christening—could not claim to have been born in the purple, unless it were the purple of newly-made riches. Her father had come to London with the legendary three-halfpence jingling in a pocket of his threadbare corduroys, had swept out the traditional shop, and had died as wealthy a man as an East India director of the good old time, when fortunes were yet to be made out of John Company's tawny subjects, had a right to be. He had married late in life, and his only child had reaped

the full benefit of his hoards. Her name, with sundry stars after it, figured among those of the holders of India stock. She had consols, too, and scrip, and mines, and lands, and London houses, and church tithes—all judicious investments of her papa's choosing.

Though prosperous, Joseph Larpent had scarcely been happy; a yellow-visaged, grizzled old Nabob, with a gnawing Nemesis of a liver, to remind him of his gainful years at Chowringhee. But he was proud, too, in his way, and, humble as his birth had been, cherished that ancestor-worship which is sometimes strongest in self-made men. There had really been a Cromwellian Joseph Larpent, Major in Harrison's Red Regiment, and maltster and brewer when Charles II. sent back the veteran Commonwealth officers

to civil life, and his descendant had no notion of permitting his hard-won cash to regild another patronymic.

"Sophia," he had been wont to say, in moments of rare confidence over the mahogany, "shall marry a sprig of nobility; and, moreover, he shall take her name, and arms too, or my Christian name isn't Joseph. The Larpents are as good a stock as any of your highflyers, and I'll not have them burked, I can tell you that, Brown!"

"No, no. Of course not. Yours is an old family," discreet Mr. Brown would reply, as he revelled in the velvet smoothness of the costly claret; and no compliment could have gone more direct to the Nabob's heart. He was a man of his word; for, when his daughter married the brother and heir-pre-

sumptive of Lord Penrith, he insisted that the bridegroom should assume the bride's name. Royal letters-patent, duly advertised in the London Gazette, empowered the Honourable Wilfred Ponsonby Beville to become a Larpent. The Honourable Wilfred had learned by sharp experience the worth of money, and, for the sake of a safe income, was willing to barter his three silver scallops of crusading memory for the heraldic red lion rampant gules, and alecask proper, on a bend azure, and field or, which the Earl Marshal's learned college had assigned to the house of Larpent.

Wilfred Larpent, né Beville, was but a feeble and vacuous spendthrift, through whose tremulous fingers money leaked like water through a sieve. He had spent his modest fortune—three times over, so ill-

natured clubmen averred—had worn out the patience not merely of the Baron his brother, but of the much enduring Jews, and would have been in jail had he not been M.P. for Bullbury, the family seat in Parliament. A limper aristocratic mollusc did not haunt the Pall-Mall pavement than this same Wilfred; but there was the sparkle of a probable coronet encircling his bankrupt brows.

"I'll take him up and make a man of him!" boastful Joseph Larpent had declared. And Joseph was, as usual, as good as his word. The Honourable Wilfred was "taken up;" lifted, that is, on the soaring wings of wealth above the sordid sphere of dependence on coarse money-lenders, and reliance on the mercy of wrathful tailors. He had pocket-money. Sovereigns still

dribbled through his be-ringed fingers. His wife's large means were, of course, as strictly tied up as ever was horse in a stable. There was a Cornish estate, small, but small only when compared with the much larger property of Lord Penrith. This had been Joseph's purchase, and Joseph's present to his daughter on the wedding-day. there was a great sum in government securities, rigidly settled too. Very shrewd solicitors and the soundest of conveyancers had drawn those settlements. The result was a success; and Sophia Larpent was practically the mistress of goods, gear, and husband.

On the strength of this marriage, of his M.P.-ship, and of his brotherhood-expectant to a peer of England, the government of the day made Wilfred Larpent a baronet. He

did not covet such distinction as a Bloody Hand in his new escutcheon could impart. Those who are chronicled in the Peerage proper seldom care much for that odd order of hereditary knighthood, the first promotions to which King James sold for a thousand pounds apiece.

But the East India Director did care very much indeed about a baronetcy for his son-in-law. He had asked for it, dunned for it, bargained for it, selling two votes—for he too was in Parliament, M.P. for Bribe-chester—to the Patronage Secretary for the "Sir" to be prefixed to Wilfred's name. He ordered his daughter's husband to accept it. Did it not make that daughter "My Lady" at once, without waiting for the demise of Lord Penrith, though he was full twenty years older than his brother;

and was not the sound, to the Nabob's ears, a dulcet one?

So Sir Wilfred lived and died, leaving three sons and a rich widow; but Joseph Larpent's eyes closed grudgingly on the pomps of this world, without having seen his Sophia a peeress. She never could be a peeress now; but it was quite on the cards, as the saying is, and more than on the cards, that Sir Lucius, her eldest son, should become Lord Penrith.

Sir Lucius was one of those gentlemen unattached who cannot accurately be called bachelors, and yet who fail to carry out the popular conception of a widower. Yet was he a widower. He had been married. There had been a young Lady Larpent, but the poor thing's tenure of wedded life, and

of her titular rank, had been very brief indeed. She had been a young lady from Staleybridge, an heiress, it is true, to a large prospective fortune, acquired by means of cotton twist, but with no actual money, no constitution worth speaking of, and the minimum of health and good looks. The poor little frightened thing had died in less than a year after her wedding-day, and there was Sir Lucius, free again, but not a whit the wealthier for his mercenary marriage.

"It was a madcap business, and has had a sad finish to it," said the Dowager, referring, as was natural, to the tiny shipwreck that had so lately occurred.

"Boys will be boys, you know, mother," said Sir Lucius, shrugging up his shoulders.

"It was awfully rash and that. But of course the boatman was mostly to blame."

"What a shame, Lucius! He saved my life, poor old chap!" blurted out impulsive Willie, "and lost his own in doing it."

"And as for his good-nature in letting us have the boat——" Edgar began; but his brother cut short his remonstrances by saying, languidly:

"There's a sort of good-nature that does mischief, and this is a specimen of it. It was clearly the man's duty to prevent your going out alone on such a day; and it is lucky that the freak did not cost you much more dearly than it has done. I should say a ten-pound note——"

"Cousin Lucius!" said Miss Stanhope, with a flush of indignant crimson, "you

really seem to rate Willie's life, and mine, and the life that was lost, at a very low value; to say nothing of the pinnace, perhaps those brave men's only property. I am sure that my uncle——"

"Never mind him just now, Maud," said the Dowager, in her decided way. "I can pay my debts, and do what is right, without troubling my lord to loosen his pursestrings. And if I find this young—what do you call him—Hugh something?"

"Ashton, Hugh Ashton!" answered both the boys together.

"If I find Hugh Ashton," pursued Lady Larpent, "only half the phænix that you young people make him out to be, I'll not be satisfied with giving him money—on a rather more liberal scale, I hope, than Lucius has recommended—but see if I can-

not help him to a better livelihood than he can make by hiring out pleasure-boats. It is a treat now and then, in this brazen, pushing age, to chance upon modest merit."

Sir Lucius raised his shoulders a very little, with a deprecatory air.

"This young Ashton's merit," he said, sneeringly, "is not likely long to retain the charm of modesty, if you all combine to turn his head by making him out a hero. Pluck, and the readiness to risk a wet jacket, are not, I hope, so very rare among Englishmen, that what this fresh-water sailor did yesterday should be magnified into another wonder of the world."

"You are a cynic, Lucius, and seldom run the risk of spoiling anyone with praise," rejoined Lady Larpent, rising as she spoke. "Do you mean to stay and enjoy your cigar in the inn garden; or will you give your escort to Maud and myself as far as the boatman's cottage? It is quite fine again, and we can walk."

"I am quite at your disposal, mother," replied the baronet, smoothly, as he caressed his moustache. "I did not come down to Wales, of course, to cultivate my own society; and I shall be delighted to be allowed to accompany you and my cousin anywhere you please; unless, indeed, you are for climbing one of those big purple mountains with the unpronounceable names, in which case I should plead for mercy."

The Dowager looked pleased first, and then a shadow as of distrust crossed her comely countenance. Perhaps the baronet had not been so dutiful or affectionate a son that his filial attentions should be received with entire confidence by his observant parent.

"He wants money from me," so thought Lady Larpent, "or he would not have come down here to join us. And he fancied that he had vexed me just now, or he would have preferred tobacco and his own thoughts to a stroll in my, or even in Maud's, company. I wish——"

But she checked the train of thought, no pleasant one, as it seemed; and Sir Lucius, on his best behaviour, as his mother inwardly remarked, made one of the party that presently set off for Hugh the boatman's cottage.

## CHAPTER IV.

## HUGH'S VISITORS.

THERE are households and households; families in which the old-fashioned rule of loyal reverence for father and mother yet prevails; and others of the modern American type, where the son is Sir Oracle and the daughter Tarquinia, and the old folks, sadly overcrowed and sorely chickpecked, yield precedence to the young. Sophia, Lady Larpent, was adapted both by nature and circumstances to have her own way in the world. She

had herself been what was pronounced a pattern daughter. But then her latent will had never come into collision with the more self-assertive volition of the wealthy father to whom she owed everything. Her husband had been mild and manageable. But her son Lucius had given her some trouble.

Sir Lucius, well-looking in his effeminate style, and with an easy, lounging grace in all his actions, gave himself the pains, as he walked beside his mother and cousin, to be conversationally pleasing, but with less of success than usually attended his efforts. Women seldom like a cynic; and the baronet's recent remarks and tone of callous frivolity had jarred with whatever was best and brightest in Maud's girl-nature. He was her cousin, and she was disposed to

like him as a cousin; but somehow she always thought more kindly of him when far away than when he was present. What was there in common between her fresh young mind and the careless philosophy of this prematurely jaded worldling, whose theory of life seemed to exclude all but the basest or the dullest interpretations of human motives and conduct?

The Dowager had reasons of her own for criticising her son's bearing and behaviour. It has been mentioned that Sir Lucius had been to her a source of trouble. When at Eton, he had contrived to get deeper into debt—so his experienced tutor averred—than any of the gilded youth of Britain concerning whose school liabilities the Rev. Henry Holyshade knew anything. So at Oxford. So in London, until his resolute

mother put a stop to the broadcast sowing of wild oats on the metropolitan pavement. Tradesmen had been paid, money-lenders compounded with, and young Sir Lucius sent abroad on a grand tour that lasted three years. He had come back improved in a certain degree, and, when he married the little Staleybridge heiress, high hopes were entertained of his future. Her early death was perhaps a greater blow to the Dowager than to her son. The Dowager did not quite fathom her son's character, and there were times when she hoped that she might never gain a thorough insight into its arcana.

That a young man should be extravagant was deplorable, of course, but not unexampled. Sir Wilfred, the father, had been extravagant; but then all his faults

had been those of weakness, and redeeming impulses flaccidly good. The faults of Sir Lucius, the son, were those of strength. He got his pennyworth for his penny, a barter not so common as it sounds; and, if he had any redeeming impulses, they were unknown to his nearest kindred. Something, though perhaps not much, might be urged on behalf of Sir Lucius. His was a puzzling position. He was a baronet—which I take to be the diminutive of a baron—without the smallest scrap of barony wherewith to maintain the honours of the open helmet, the collar of SS, the hereditary Sirship, and the Red Hand of Ulster. He would most likely be a peer of the realm, but not certainly so. And he had no claim in any case, save to the bare coronet and the sterile robes of

Old Lord Penthe hereditary legislator. rith could do what he liked with the Beville property. Very few lords can do as much. He, however, had the power of willing away every acre of the estates; and nobody doubted that he would leave all within his gift to Maud Stanhope, the only child of his only sister. Sir Lucius that was, Viscount Penrith that might be, was absolutely dependent at nine-and-twenty for the bread he ate, for the loose silver in his pocket, for the means of paying his valet or his washerwoman, on his mother. And his mother was a benevolent despot, fonder of Edgar, fonder by far of Willie than she was of the first-born, and a little too apt to make the baronet remember that the ample fortune at her command was hers, not his.

In one respect, and perhaps one only,

the views of mother and son did thoroughly coincide. Both thought it most expedient that Sir Lucius should re-marry, and that the wife of his choice should be Maud Stanhope. That the baronet himself should turn his attention to his beautiful cousin, universally regarded as a great heiress in prospective, was natural enough. But it was odder that the Dowager, who liked Maud and almost loved her, and who prized and esteemed her, should have mentally published the banns of marriage in such a case.

Lady Larpent was not blinded by parental partiality. She knew her son to be sly, selfish, pitiless, and profligate. Ladies often look with indulgence on those reformed rakes who are assumed to make the best of husbands. But a rake unreformed, and perhaps irreclaimable, such as Lady Larpent suspected the future Viscount to be, was scarcely a fit mate for Maud. But, for all that, it was Lady Larpent's sincerest wish that Maud should wed Sir Lucius; that the Penrith property and title should be kept together; and that the scheme of her own father, Joseph Larpent, for the aggrandisement of his race, should be brought to a triumphant conclusion.

Maud, as she walked on towards the boatman's cottage, thought no more of marrying Sir Lucius Larpent than she thought of being changed, after the old Grecian mythic fashion, into a tree or a floweret. And she paid very little heed to the baronet's conversation. To Maud's mind, this was not the season for small-talk, however good-humoured such small-talk

might be. To her fancy, what had happened seemed to mark a turning-point in her young life—her life that had been all but lost, and the peril of which, narrowly escaped, had brought home to her the unaccustomed thought of death, and all that death implies. She had been preserved, but another had been garnered in by the grim mower. The brave man who had saved her boy-cousin had paid dearly for his good deed. Word had been brought to the hotel that George Ashton's body had been found. An inquest, of course, must be held; but in the meantime the poor fellow's remains were allowed to rest peaceably beneath his own roof.

At the cottage-door stood Hugh Ashton, mending a net. The young boatman wore his Sunday suit of black, and his face was pale and sad. A slight tinge of colour rose to his sunburnt cheek as he saw the party from the hotel approach him. He lifted his hat and stood, with one muscular hand grasping a festoon of the tattered net that hung from nail and peg above the low-browed porch of painted wood. The boys went eagerly up to him; but the Dowager was the first to speak.

"I am very much grieved and concerned," she said, kindly but patronizingly, "for your grief, Mr. Ashton, and for the melancholy cause of it. I am sorry too to see you at work again, and so soon. I hope there is no immediate necessity for——" And her plump, gloved fingers dived for her purse, the golden contents of which she had through life found to be a marvellous salve for hurts and injuries of all sorts.

But Hugh took no notice of the Dowager's significant fumbling.

"The poor, Madam, must work, even when sorrow is in the house," he said, gravely; "and they have the less time for that reason to feel the sharpness of the sorrow. I am glad to-day that I cannot afford to be idle. Yes; I have the old net to be busy with. It will be wanted more than ever, and so will the skiff, now the pinnace is gone."

"I will take care that you are not a loser—so far as money goes—by the wreck of the pinnace," said Lady Larpent, hastily. "That, Mr. Ashton, would be but common justice."

"It is more that common justice, I am afraid," returned Hugh, sadly. "I cannot put in a claim, in conscience,

for the breaking up of the large boat, nor consent to take your Ladyship's bounty under the name of compensation. It was no fault of the young gentleman here that the pinnace struck the rock."

The Dowager looked perplexed. Sir Lucius, in the background, silently arched his eyebrows and compressed his lips, as who should say: "An old trick this, and a stale one—the disinterested dodge—to get higher terms."

"Our fault it was, though, or my fault, being so much the older," burst out Edgar, bravely and boyishly. "And why you should be too proud, Hugh, to take a new boat for the one we knocked against the Lion Rock, I can't so much as guess. It's fair play; that is just as if, you know, I

had sprung another fellow's cricket-bat, or broken a gun he had lent me. Don't you see?"

A pleasant smile brightened Hugh Ashton's handsome face.

"I see, Mr. Edgar, that you mean very kindly by me," he replied; "and I thank you. But the pinnace never should have been loosed from her moorings, with a storm brewing and none but yourselves aboard; and, that being so, we"—his voice faltered, and his lip trembled a little here—"must bear the loss."

Sir Lucius, with an air of ineffable boredom, turned languidly towards the panorama of lake and mountain. The Dowager knit her brows and looked embarrassed. This young boatman, with his strange fearless manner and his stranger scruples, seemed inconsist-

ent with her comfortable theory of life, an article of which was, that the Have-nots eagerly accept such good things as the more fortunate Haves deign to toss to them.

"I have not yet paid my debt, my very great debt of thanks for a life saved, Mr. Ashton, by your bravery," said Maud, in her sweet low voice; "nor have I yet said how sorry I am—how sorry we all are—that our rashness and the sad accident should have made you fatherless. Perhaps we did wrong to come here so soon—perhaps we may appear to intrude upon your grief, Mr. Ashton—but indeed I am so sorry for you." She was weeping now, this high-born beauty, and the very ring of her voice carried with it the conviction

that this was no conventional phrase of condolence.

Hugh's bronzed face crimsoned, and then grew paler than before.

"Thank you, young lady, thank you," he replied, with a sob, that shook his strong frame. "He was a kind father to me, and a good man—he whom I have lost—and I shall be very lonely here."

"Then why stay here?" said the Dowager, all the best part of her nature coming to the front, and with real womanly sympathy in her softened voice. "There are many careers surely open to a young man of sense and spirit. My boys tell me you have travelled and seen the world at sea and in the colonies. Something might be

found—I know all kinds of people who manage Companies, and own ships, and that sort of thing. You must allow me to be your friend, Mr. Hugh, you must indeed. And now," added her ladyship more briskly, "you shall let us in, if you please, for I really think it is going to rain again."

Hugh reddened afresh. "I ask your pardon, ladies," he said, not ungracefully, but with an Englishman's painful self-reproach; and as he spoke he pushed wide the half-shut door of the cottage, and busied himself in setting chairs for his guests. Scrupulously neat and trim was the interior of this poor dwelling, in an inner room of which lay the dead. There were sketches on the white-washed walls, rudely framed but well executed, of strange scenes far away. Here

hung the model of a ship, there a case of stuffed birds, a spear barbed with fish-teeth, a great shell, or a barbaric necklace of coral and stained ivory.

"You must be an excellent draughtsman, Mr. Ashton, if these are your own," observed the Dowager, glancing at the sketches.

"My father did them, Lady Larpent," said the young man, almost curtly; and then added, in a gentle tone, "My fingers, I am afraid, are more at home in handling the tiller than in managing a pencil or a paint-brush; but he tried to teach me that with other things."

"Foreign languages, I suppose, among them?" said Lady Larpent, taking note of the well-thumbed volumes that filled the tiny bookshelf near her seat. "A good education, Mr. Hugh, will help you faster up the ladder of life than I can do with the best will in the world."

Now in this the Dowager was not quite truthful; for she was privately, like most very rich persons whose wealth came to them without trouble, of opinion that learning is a capital substitute for land and money, but only when the one is sold and the other spent.

Yes; Hugh admitted that he could read German, and speak French, and Spanish better than French, and had a smattering of knowledge picked up in the course of a wandering life.

"A little farming, as people farm in a hotter climate and a rougher country than this, and a little seamanship and navigation, are about the best of it, my lady," said

the young man, modestly. "I will not deny, however, that I should be glad to leave this place. It has grown to be hateful to me since"—and here his eyes wandered to the closed door of the room where his father's body lay, and there was a choking sob in his throat as he resumed—"since yesterday; and I shall be thankful to accept any new opening in life which your kindness may offer to me."

Very well. Lady Larpent's departure with her family from the Welsh lake-side village was fixed for the morrow. She was going home—home to Cornwall, whence she pledged herself to communicate by letter with Hugh Ashton so soon as she should hear of some vacancy, the reversion of which her influence might be

strong enough to obtain for him. In the meantime she drew out her purse. "Would Mr. Ashton let her leave ten pounds in his hands—well then, five—he must have many expenses?"

Never had the Dowager felt so awkward before, when proffering a portion of her abundance to a worldly inferior. But Hugh gently and steadily declined. He had a little money, he said; enough, at any rate, for present needs, and for the cost of the funeral. He was grateful for her ladyship's thoughtfulness; but he was evidently unwilling to accept the cash which she vainly pressed upon him.

Then, the short-lived shower being over, the party from the "Royal Cambrian" walked back to their hotel, first taking a friendly leave of Hugh, while Maud renewed her thanks, and Lady Larpent her promises of service.

"I have seldom," said the Dowager, on their homeward way, "been more pleased with anyone than with this gallant young fellow."

"Isn't he? just that!" exclaimed enthusiastic Edgar; and Maud smiled a silent approval.

The words, or the smile, nettled the irritable temper of Sir Lucius. "The fellow has pluck enough," he said, peevishly; "and seems to be exactly one of those smart, half-educated youngsters who, in the army, rise rapidly to sergeant-major, are too clever by half, and come to grief, and a court-martial, through muddling the regimental accounts. I'd draw him a cheque, if I were you, mother; but cer-

tainly not make myself responsible for introductions; 'pon my word, I wouldn't!"

"I differ from you, Lucius, on that as on other points," returned the Dowager, knitting her resolute brows. "In my opinion, Hugh Ashton is worthy of your good word as well as of my good offices. And these latter shall not be lacking."

And then the subject dropped.

## CHAPTER V.

## AT LLOSTHUEL COURT.

THOSE crags of granite, reddish here, bluish there in the shade, but which the sun's first gleam turns to glowing crimson and sparkling azure, have a character of their own, and can belong to one portion only, and that the wildest, of the coasts of storm-lashed Britain. The barren heath above, brown and purple, and gorgeous with yellow broom and golden gorse, with stones protruding from its dusky surface,

like the bones of a buried giant, has its character too. How grandly the rocks stand forward to bear and beat back the rush of the mighty tide-waves—billows such as only surge in from the vast Atlantic, to break upon the Cornish cliffs, all scarred and splintered by their fury. Cornwall it is that, in its weird beauty of hovering mist and rich colour, lies before us; and that crescent-shaped town in the bay, halfwatering place, half-fishing village, is Tre-There is a Tréport in France, own cousin to this one; but the Treport of our story faces less south than west, towards the measureless waters, over the shimmering surface of which many a Cornish mariner must have gazed with untaught inquisitiveness, long before a Genoese pilot, called Christopher Colon, or Columbus, showed the way to the immense Americas that lay beyond.

The mansion nestling high up among masses of old trees, oaks and elms, that in Kent or Berkshire would be classed as of common stature, but which are Anaks of the forest here, in this region of sweeping gales and salt sea air, is Llosthuel Court, chronicled in local guide-books. Debrett and Dod and Murray, great authorities all, agree with the local guide-books in declaring it to be the seat of the Honourable the Dowager Lady Larpent.

Llosthuel Court had been one of old Joseph Larpent's judicious investments. In England as in France, to buy up land in small plots and parcels, by retail as it were, notoriously needs a long purse and a lavish hand. But a shrewd purchaser, who can

afford to offer a large lump sum for land by wholesale, gets a respectable return for his money, coupled with that prestige which nothing but "the dirty acres" can confer. These particular acres had been bought cheaply enough from a beggared spendthrift, who lacked but cash and credit to emulate the extravagance of his ancestors. Over Llosthuel Court and its wide domains Lady Larpent now reigned supreme.

To say that the Dowager, as uncontrolled mistress of this large property, with all its claims manorial and riparian, its royalty of mines and minerals, its rights of fishery and turbary, of pasturage and pannage, was universally popular, would be to say too much. Few very prosperous persons can expect to be viewed, while living, through that flattering halo which invests the dead.

Some grumbling attended Lady Larpent's high-handed efforts even to do good. People are not to be hustled out of the familiar grooves, even though the grooves be those of squalor and barbarism, without indulging in the British solace of a growl. And so there were those who felt, and those who feigned to feel, a sentimental regret for the "old Squires," as they called the dispossessed Penhuels of Llosthuel—King Logs at their best—and who spoke of the Dowager behind her back by the nicknames of My Lady Absolute and Madam Moneybags.

It was a mellow day, tenderly bright, as becomes the Far West, and the peacocks on the stone terrace sunned their sweeping trains and sheeny necks until every jewelled iris of their resplendent feathers sparkled in

the welcome rays. In the blue drawingroom—there was a white as well as a vellow and a blue drawing-room at Llosthuel Court -was Maud Stanhope, alone beside an open window that commanded a pleasant prospect: rose-garden, and terrace, and shrubbery, green meadow and savage moor, and the many-hued flashing sea-all blended in one bird's-eye view. She had a book in her hand; but she was not reading, neither did she heed those plumed magnificos the peacocks, that, as they slowly strutted past, would intermit their stately march to stretch forth their serpentine necks and lift their tufted heads in mercenary hopes of biscuit. Her eyes—beautiful brown eyes were Maud's—passed inattentive over the glowing colour of the clumps of scarlet geranium, over the velvet greensward, over the softer green of the ferns, and seemed to gaze dreamily at the far-off range of the Welsh hills, dim and blue against the sky-line. It was evident that the girl's thoughts were far away from Llosthuel Court and all that belonged to it.

A rustle of silk, a firm, weighty tread on the soft Tournay carpet, and Maud becomes conscious that her hostess is in the room. She turns, smiling.

"I have left you for a long time, my dear," said the Dowager, with old-fashioned cordiality; "but I am a woman of business, as I often tell you, and I have had to answer half a dozen letters since the post-bag came in, and to set aside as many more of them, endorsed, in red ink, 'No;' 'Ask for particulars;' 'Refer to London solicitors;' 'Will consider it;' and 'Politely, no,' for the

guidance of my right-hand man-I don't quite like styling him a secretary, and he would prefer not being called a clerk-Mr. Morris. By-the-by, Morris brings me word that old Captain Cleat, of the steamer Western Maid, is dead at last. Poor old Cleat! he had been crippled with the rheumatism, and fitter for the fireside than the deck, these eighteen months—and since Christmas a bed-ridden invalid—but we didn't like to appoint a successor while he lived. Now I have in my own mind fixed new commander for the Western Maid. Can you guess, Maud, love, who it is?"

Maud tried to look and even to feel a becoming interest.

"Whoever is to have the post, Aunt Larpent," she said, "will have a very pretty vessel to command. The Western Maid, as she lies in harbour yonder, looks as trim as a yacht."

"Trim enough she is," answered the Dowager, in her imperious way: "but that's because I hate to see anything, affoat or ashore, go to ruin, out of candle-end economy. The other shareholders, but for me, would have grudged every coat of fresh paint and inch of new sail-cloth; but, as it is, the steamer is spruce enough. I would bet any amount of kid gloves, Maud, my dear, that you cannot guess the name of her new captain! Well, then, I have written to offer the appointment to the hero of your last month's boating adventure at Gwen Naut-that young Ashton-Hugh Ashton. I suspect you have forgotten his name already. At your age," complacently continued Lady Larpent, "it is almost as easy to forget as to learn; but at my time of life it is different."

Maud was inwardly thankful that the Dowager's self-satisfaction rendered her so conveniently blind to the fact that her niece's face had suddenly flushed to a burning crimson, and almost as soon grown pale at the mention of Hugh Ashton's name. Miss Stanhope was angry with herself because the thing was so, because her aunt's words chanced to be in such unexpected coincidence with her own thoughts, just as a random shot may fire a magazine of gun-Had she passed through the powder. novitiate of a London season—which I take to be for girls what the hardening ordeal is for a Red Indian warrior—and was she to blush thus absurdly at the mere mention of

a young man who had certainly rendered her a great service, but who was as far remote from her own sphere in life as though they had been inhabitants of different planets? Why, the ninth daughter of a country elergyman could not have shown less of high-bred indifference than she, Maud Stanhope, had done. Luckily the Dowager, sharp-sighted enough on ordinary occasions, saw nothing of Maud's tell-tale change of colour.

"Yes; the Western Maid, it seems to me, will be the very thing for young Ashton. He does not know the coast, and perhaps not much of steamers; but Long Michael, as they call him, is a good mate, and will help him out of a scrape until he sees his way. I daresay the other shareholders will grumble in their sleeves. Each of them

G

VOL. I.

would like a kinsman, and in any case a Cornishman, some Pol, Tre, or Pen, to get the appointment," said the lady of Llosthuel, with that air of confident reliance on her own judgment which was familiar to all who knew her; "but I am the Company. At all events, I have written to this young fellow Hugh, to make him the offer."

"You have written, aunt?" rejoined Maud, feeling it incumbent on her to say something, and speaking as unconcernedly as she could.

"Yes. I have no doubt of his acceptance, and as little that the Board will confirm my nomination," replied Lady Larpent. "Have you seen Lucius to-day?" she asked; and, as she put the question, her observant eyes sought Maud's face. But this time there was not the faintest indication of a blush.

No; Maud had not seen Sir Lucius, her cousin. The baronet was a late riser, and carried his London hours with him into the country. At breakfast he was never visible, declaring, as he did, that a slice of toast and a cup of chocolate supplied his simple needs; but that no motive less cogent than a meet of the foxhounds could persuade him to curtail his slumbers to the extent necessary to enable him to put in an appearance at the morning meal.

Time, in Sir Lucius's opinion, passed but very tediously at Llosthuel Court, and he had even come to feel something like a personal enmity towards the turret clock, which struck the hours of the day with such pedantic slowness. He chafed, as chainedup dogs are prone to chafe, against the quasi-bondage to which he had to submit. Why was he at Llosthuel, why condemned to inhabit a dwelling beneath the roof of which he must be on his best behaviour, and to saunter away his days beside the sea?

Sir Lucius did not care a straw for the sea. At Cowes it was all very well, since the yachts, and the Club, and the matches could not very well exist without saltwater; but the Atlantic was to our dandy baronet as dreary as Sahara. His mother's grand mansion, in his eyes, was as dismal as a prison, and as prim as a boarding-school. He would sooner have been elsewhere—almost anywhere, even in London, at that time of year fashionably impossible,

had it not been for his debts. And the worst of it was that his debts were ubiquitous, meddling with, and influencing every action and detail of his life. He had paid what he could not help paying to the more importunate and energetic among his tradesmen, and the sacrifice had left him almost penniless.

Sir Lucius had invitations by the dozen, and might have spent his week, his three days, or his fortnight, at halls, castles, and abbeys, the owners whereof, noble, gentle, or plutocratic, would have feasted and fêted him splendidly enough, given him the run of their partridge preserves, and pheasant covers, and grouse moors, and private theatricals; or mounted him, when the hunting season should set in, on the pick of the stable; and, in fact, done all that

hospitality suggested, except the supplying him with ready-money. There was the rub. Without ready-money, as he acknowledged with a sigh, English country-visiting is, for a sporting bachelor, especially when that bachelor has a handle to his name. impossible. There are fast country-houses where gambling in some shape, even though it take the form of guinea-pool, or of unlimited loo in the small hours, is always going on. There are slow country-houses where gruff grooms of the stables, and gracious grooms of the chambers, martinet head-keepers, and Behemoths of butlers, levy cruel toll upon the purses of their master's guests. There are half a score of cases constantly turning up in which he whom Dives delights to honour must put his hand in his pocket; and woe to

his social good character if that pocket be empty!

Those of Sir Lucius were as bare as the pockets of a man of his station well could be, and all his diplomacy had hitherto failed in producing the desired effect of inducing his mother to replenish them.

"It is a pity that Lucius should be so idle," said the Dowager, with a slight contraction of her resolute brows.

"It is a pity, I am sure, that he should have nothing to interest him," returned Maud.

"What are you two about—singing my praises, I hope, for I certainly caught the sound of my own name?" imperturbably inquired Sir Lucius, as he strolled into the room. "How do you do, mother?—Good morning, Maud! It is morning still?

you know, socially and conventionally, though the shadow of the sun-dial points the wrong way, and the natives have trudged from work to what they call their dinner, and trudged back again, already. I should like excessively to be a ploughboy, and earn my eighteen-pence a day, and have a healthy appetite for beans and bacon! As it is, I feel myself an awful drone, mother, in this agricultural hive of yours, and scarcely like to venture out into the model farm, for fear the working bees should set upon me, and sting me to death, as not worth my keep, I assure you."

## CHAPTER VI.

## SIR LUCIUS AT HOME.

THERE are Happy Families elsewhere than behind the wires of a travelling showman's cage, and in the very best society we may often find the keen raven and the plump guinea-pig, the pert magpie, the pink-eyed rabbit, the meek white mouse, and the blinking owl, in pacific contiguity. The cuckoo differs less from the hedge-sparrow than do some brothers and sisters, some parents and children, from their

nearest and dearest. Can flashing Miss Falcon really be the daughter of mild Mrs. Dove? Is yonder bold-faced boy, who seems ready, like a young buccaneer, to take the world by storm, actually of the same brood as gentle James the budding curate, or that incipient City man, careful little Bertie? Nothing but the viewless chain of habit could link together natures so various and so antagonistic.

Sir Lucius Larpent, in the family to which he belonged, bore some resemblance to a hawk in a poultry-yard; and, just as a hawk whose clipped wing-feathers disable him from flight, learns to consort peaceably with the very hens over whose half-fledged chickens he was wont to hover ominous, so did the baronet try to appear

in as favourable a light as possible before the other inmates of Llosthuel Court. temper was bad; but he kept it, like a runaway horse, well in hand. His selfishness was too patent to be concealed; but he was clever enough to gloss it over with a certain half-humorous varnish that was not wholly unattractive—at least to women, who rather like a young man to possess, as the phrase is, a will of his own, and who do not object to his having personal tastes and habits of a decided sort. But Lady Larpent had her doubts. Her other offspring had characters that she could appreciate. Edgar promised to turn out a generous, manly young fellow. Willie was a bright, loveable boy. The Dowager sighed now and then as the suspicion forced itself upon her that her eldest

son differed from his brothers as a vulture differs from a pigeon.

But Sir Lucius, good, bad, or indifferent, as the case might be, was still the head of the family, a baronet in fact, and, in all probability, the future Lord Penrith. As such it was much to be desired that he should become the husband of Maud Stanhope. Such was Lady Larpent's pet project; and it cost her many an anxious moment, and many a sleepless hour that so little progress should be made towards bringing the young people together. It had been a part of the Dowager's simple social belief that a young man and a young woman, brought into each other's society in a rather dull, country-house, must of necessity fall in love. To this end she had insisted that Maud should

prolong her visit, and that Sir Lucius should continue to be a resident beneath her roof. To this end she tightened her purse-strings, and was deaf to her son's frequent hints that a supply of cash just then would be peculiarly acceptable.

Alas! in matters matrimonial, as in other affairs, there is often a justification for the homely proverb which tells us that, although you may bring a horse to the water, you cannot make him drink. It is of no use to bring two young people together, if of such bringing nothing comes. And so it was in this instance. All Lady Larpent's pains and forethought were apparently wasted. She did indeed see, or thought that she saw, some slight indications on Sir Lucius's part of a preference for Maud's society; but, if real, the sentiment

was too feeble to ruffle the languid equanimity of the baronet's habitual demeanour. And Miss Stanhope did not at any time appear to have her titled cousin uppermost in her thoughts.

"I have got, or am going to have, a new captain for the Western Maid, Lucius," said the Dowager, recurring to the previous topic, since a subject of discourse in the quietude of country life will, like leaf-gold, bear a good deal of hammering. "Old Captain Cleat, who commanded the steamer, is dead. And I can do as I like now."

"Western Maid? Ah yes! that's the prettyish bit of a boat in harbour at Treport there, and that belongs to the Royal Cornish Tug and Salvage Company, which I take to be a fine and round-about way,

mother, of describing yourself. It was my grandfather Joseph that founded the Company, wasn't it? and left you about nine hundred of the thousand shares which compose it; so that you can give your orders to the Company, I fancy, just as you can to any other understrappers in these parts. Well, who is to have the command of this trim little coasting-steamer of your ladyship's? Some old Triton, I suppose, who has a red face and a hoarse voice, due to the combined effects of rum and bad weather, and who might be twin-brother to Cleat departed."

Lady Larpent was often amused at her son's sallies. She had her doubts, however, as to how far this one might be good-naturedly meant, so she knit her weighty brows as she said:

"The future captain of the Western Maid, Lucius, is a person very unlike your ideal portrait, being, as he is, no other than the brave young fellow who saved Maud's life at Bala yonder—Hugh Ashton by name."

"What! the boatman—the fresh-water sailor?" exclaimed Sir Lucius, with a sneer that for the moment disfigured his handsome mouth. "What, in the name of all that's astonishing, mother, can have put it into your head to give the command of a smart vessel to such a fellow as that?"

It is singular how varied a meaning may be attached to the word "fellow," according to the intonation of the speaker. It can imply an affectionate familiarity, a sort of verbal caress, or a simple and impartial description; or again, a contemptuous gibe. Sir Lucius had imparted to its harmless two syllables as bitter a seasoning of scorn as human lips could well express.

"He saved my life—he risked his own in doing so," said Maud Stanhope, indignantly. "I am sorry, cousin, that the service should count for so little in your eyes."

"And I am sorry, Lucius," said the Dowager, gravely, and with displeasure in her voice, "that you permit yourself to speak thus disparagingly regarding one of whom you know, as I am well assured, nothing but good, and whom I am myself inclined to think rather more highly of than you do. I feel that a debt of gratitude is owing on the part of the family to this Hugh Ashton—none the less so

because his father perished in the act of helping my dear Willie to reach the shore—and I, at all events, have an old-fashioned habit of not neglecting what I consider as a duty. Llosthuel, after all, is mine—my own" (perhaps these last words were rather too emphatically spoken), "and so is the rest of my property, including my interest in that Coasting Company, concerning which you have chosen to be so witty, Lucius."

Sir Lucius winced, and bit his lip sharply—it was a trick of his from boyhood, when thwarted—and then the scowl that had gathered about his darkling brows passed away, and it was with a bright smile and a light laugh that he made answer:

"You are right, mother, and I was wrong. I spoke hastily, as I suppose, and

I am afraid not quite fairly, of this nautical paladin of yours in the blue Jersey and straw hat. He has lots of pluck, anyhow, and swims like an otter; and we ought all of us to be much obliged to him, I am sure, for his spirited behaviour at Gwen Nant," continued the baronet in a tone that he tried to prevent from being grudging and sarcastic. "But there did seem to be something comical at first sight in the idea of transplanting him from fresh to salt water. Who was Dibdin's rustic hero, that

"Left his poor plough to go ploughing the deep ?"

This is a change of the same sort, but perhaps less striking. At anyrate, I wish Mr. Hugh Ashton good luck—full nets at the pilchard-fishing, and, later on, plenty of wrecks—if it isn't wrong to say so—as captain of the Western Maid."

Lady Larpent was mollified, but not quite content. She had observed more than once that any positive assertion of her own rights and powers as regarded the · management of the property was certain to have a sobering influence over the skittish temper of her son. And it is not the noblest nature upon which a veiled threat produces more effect than argument or entreaty could do. Also her shrewd ear was prompt to detect something discordant, like a false note in music, in the baronet's recent speech. But Maud, whom experience had not as yet gifted with the skill to know the ring of base metal when she heard it, softened towards her kinsman.

"That is kind—that is generous of you, Lucius," said the girl, sidling towards her cousin as she spoke, and smiling upon him. A glorious smile it was, that rare one of Maud's; and Lady Larpent, as she noted it, began to hope that her own matchmaking day-dream might at length come Then came in Willie and Edgar, making tumultuous entry, as boys always do, and full, as boys always are, of news and rumours, in which marriage and giving in marriage find no place. There was a stir among the miners. Polwheedle and Tredyddlum mines had suddenly been closed, and three parishes were idle and breadless.

"Not a hundred ounces a week all this year, they say, to send to Lostwithiel smelting-works, from both the pits together,"

said Edgar, with a boy's solemn affectation of superior knowledge; "so I suppose the London Company won't find money any longer for expenses, though the poor women, with their shawls over their heads, are crooning and crying about the main adit like mad.—Isn't it a shame, mother?"

"Then there's a Portuguese brig, with a cargo of wine, and abandoned by her crew, washing, washing to and fro with every tide, and last sighted off the Eddystone." It was Willie who narrated this, which he had lately heard from fishers on the beach; and at the hearing of it Sir Lucius smiled.

"A chance for your protégé, mother," he said, lightly. "A derelict wine-ship in the Channel, I take it, is the nearest approach

to a captured Spanish galleon that our prosaic laws allow in these degenerate days, and I believe you let your hounds have a share of the quarry they run down."

"Our rules," said Lady Larpent, somewhat stiffly, "certainly do allow the commander of a steamer some part of the salvage earned by the Company in such a case. But come, Lucius, we had better let the subject drop, if you please. British seamen, so far as my experience goes, always think of saving life first, and their claims on the Admiralty Court afterwards; and Hugh Ashton, I am sure, will be no exception to the rule when he comes among us here."

The boys opened their eyes. But when they heard that their humble acquaintance of Gwen Nant was to be the new captain of the Western Maid, their delight was hearty and honest.

"Dear old Hugh!" exclaimed both in a breath. "I don't know a better fellow, or a braver; and it will be as good as a play to have him so near us as Treport here."

## CHAPTER VII.

### HUGH ASHTON'S NEW ABODE.

"THERE'S a conveyance, of a sort, waiting for you, I reckon—that's to say if your name's Ashton," said the porter at the railway station of Peneath, the nearest halting-place upon the iron road for visitors to Treport.

Very few passengers had alighted at Peneath during the brief stoppage of the train: merely some three or four mining folks, pale-faced and gaunt, a preacher in rusty black, and carrying his own luggage in the shape of an emaciated valise, and two farmers' wives returning from the weekly sale of their butter and eggs at some market-town. Only these and Hugh Ashton.

"Here be your passenger, 'Nezer!" called out the porter, when Hugh had assented to his ownership of the name. "Look sharp, my lad, 'cause I've got to get them empty waggons into a siding afore the Kittlebury express comes by. Quick's the word."

The person addressed by this singular appellation, and who had been standing, with averted face, beside a nondescript vehicle, something between cart and gig, drawn by a rough pony, now came shambling forward, and gave a hasty twitch to

the battered tarpaulin hat which he wore slouched down over his shaggy brows. He was of dwarfish stature, broad but misshapen; and his clumsy body was surmounted by a huge head, crowned by a fell of red hair, coarse enough and long enough for the mane of a horse. Close behind this unprepossessing personage came a fine dog of the Newfoundland breed, handsome, vigorous, and well cared for.

"You're Master Ashton? I'm Cap'en Trawl's serving-lad, sent with the Cap'en's compliments to drive the gig that's to fetch ye down to Treport. The box be yourn, I guess, and the bag—nothing more? All right, then," added the dwarf, as, after lifting Hugh's luggage into the nondescript vehicle, he scrambled to his perch, and

clutched the reins in his bony hand, signing at the same time to the young man to seat himself beside him.

There was no need to use the whip. A shrill chirrup like the call of a bird sufficed to start the rough pony at a fast trot, and off rattled the equipage along one of the smooth Cornish roads that intersect the rugged Cornish country.

Hugh looked about him to right and left—at the rolling moorland stretching far away, and variegated here and there by croft and pasture; at the bleak hillside, strewn with stones and honeycombed with holes, each one the adit of an abandoned mine; at the green glens, where tinkling streams ran down past mill and orchard; and at the wattled barns and white farmhouses that nestled in nooks sheltered from

the sweeping sea-wind. All the landscape was new to him. He was going to Treport, in compliance with Lady Larpent's offer of the command of a coasting steamer. The Dowager, imperatively kind as usual, had written to inform Hugh Ashton that she had made arrangements for his being received as a lodger beneath the roof of a certain superannuated merchant captain, Trawl by name, who inhabited a pretty little house in the outskirts of the tiny Captain Trawl's gig it was, with town. Captain Trawl's pony in the shafts, in which Hugh was now being whisked seawards from the railway station.

The talkative driver seemed ready to afford any amount of information as to the spot whither Hugh was bound.

"A tidy place Treport—a tidyish place

that is; for it's nothing to compare to Pentargle Churchtown, where I was born, sixteen mile away, round the Head.—Yes; they call me 'Nezer. Hard, I say, to be shortened o' the best half of my name I was christened by; but I suppose folks thought Ebenezer too long a word to be tacked to such a chap as me," added the dwarf, resentfully. "I'm a beachman, master."

"A beachman, eh?" returned Hugh, looking in some perplexity at the queer figure beside him, arrayed in semi-rustic, semi-nautical style, an old monkey-jacket, with its horn buttons, contrasting with agricultural-looking gaiters and nailed boots.

"Yes; by birth, that is," explained the dwarf. "Regular beachman. Not a chap

on Pentargle pier-head has had more of his family lost at sea than myself," he continued, consequentially; "only," with a glance at his uneven shoulders, "not bein' fit to go afloat myself, I was obliged to come down in the world, and go to farm-service inland, just to earn my bread, master."

"You didn't like that so well, bred among sailors as you had been, I suppose?" said Hugh Ashton, with a good-natured patience that was not lost upon the dwarf, for 'Nezer's tone became gentler as he replied:

"No; I didn't, master. Farmers mostly be a mean lot, and close-fisted to boot—not like us free fishers. And I was main glad when I was took on to serve old Cap'en Trawl, that lives so close to the sea you can

smell the blue water, and make myself useful sorter-way. This be gig to-day," he added, with a grin; "but it'll be cart again come Friday, when I has to take the pigs over to Lanceletter Market. We just changes the seats," he explained, proudly, as he pointed out to his passenger the ingenious construction of the serviceable vehicle of which he was Jehu; "and there you are."

"And that is Captain Trawl's dog, I suppose?—and a fine dog too," remarked Hugh, as he watched the great Newfoundland bounding along the strip of smooth turf that lined the road.

"Wrong you are, master," chuckled the dwarf. "Neptune be my dog; and I'd not part with him to anybody, unless indeed Miss Rose asked me to give him to her. But money wouldn't buy him. Five golden sovereigns, and five to the back of that, a tourist gentleman offered me this summertide for Nep; and, when he found I wouldn't sell the dog, he got angry, and called I a fool for my pains. But I knowed better. Where'd you find a friend as true as Nep? Except you can swim, master?"

"Yes; I can swim," answered Hugh, with rather a sad smile.

"You look like it," said 'Nezer, with a half-envious, half-admiring glance at the stalwart form of his companion. "I can't; and when I missed my footing and fell into ten foot of water in quay-pool there, I'd never have got out alive but for Nep. I begged him from Lord Bodmin's game-keeper, when he war a pup; and they war goin' to drownd him, to save trouble, my

lord bein' away, and no demand for that kind o' dog in those parts; and I suppose Neptune thought one good turn deserved I left inland because farmer another. wouldn't let me keep Nep. 'I can't have no more dogs about the place,' says he; 'so either he hangs, or you tumble out, my lad.' Tumble out I did, and footed it to Treport; and Cap'en Trawl he be the best of men, and he took me on, and never grudged Nep his meat.—There be the sea!" he exclaimed as, suddenly between two hills, the silvery stretch of illimitable ocean came in view; "and yon's Treport; and Cap'en Trawl lives down there to the left, among the trees that hide the house, this side they do."

"And what's that big house—some gentleman's place of course—high up on

the cliffs?" asked Hugh, his heart throbbing capriciously as he propounded this very natural question.

"That be Llosthuel—the Court—my Lady Larpent's," answered 'Nezer, jerking the rein; and Hugh, as he knew that he was looking on the distant walls of the mansion beneath the roof of which dwelt the beautiful young lady whom it had been his privilege so lately to rescue from death, felt his cheeks burn, he knew not why, as the colour mounted unbidden to his face. Then a twist in the road shut out Llosthuel from his sight; and the gig was soon jolting over the uneven pavement and through the narrow streets of primitive Treport.

Captain Trawl's place of residence, when reached, by its appearance more than justified the wisdom of the Dowager's choice.

It was a pretty white-walled cottage, overgrown with blossomed creepers, and standing in a garden where the myrtle, the fuchsia, and the geranium grew with a luxuriance which finds no parallel within the limits of the four seas, save in that warm wet climate of South Cornwall. Behind it were an orchard and a meadow and a miniature farm-yard; and altogether it was evident that the lines of this veteran of the deep, in the evening of his life, had fallen in pleasant places. The drowsy hum of bees and the soft cooing of pigeons reached Hugh's ear as he alighted, oddly mingling with the wash of the waves and the rattle of the pebbles on the beach, but some score or two of yards away. Captain Trawl himself, a brass-bound telescope tucked under his left arm, and a glazed hat

crowning his thin grey hairs, came frankly forward to the garden-gate to greet his guest.

"You're welcome, Mr. Ashton, for my Lady Larpent's sake," he said, holding out his big brown hand, the back of which was decorated with an ineffaceable purple scar, extending from the thumb to the fourth finger. "Or Captain Ashton, rather I should say, since the Board has confirmed you as skipper of the Western Maid, and a decent craft she is, for one of your newfangled tea-kettle steamers. You'll find your room ready, and supper too presently."

Hugh returned the friendly grasp of the old man's hand, acknowledging to himself that he was fortunate, to all appearance, both in his landlord and the place of his abode. Captain Trawl's former calling would have been guessed by the most unperceptive of observers, in any Northamptonshire town or Leicestershire village, where a sailor was as much out of place as a Bedouin Arab would have been. He was a rough but kindly old fellow, with the voice and somewhat of the gait of an amiable bear; and his reception of the newcomer left little to be desired.

"A glass of ale or cider, or a nip of rum, before supper?" he asked.—
"Well, well; perhaps you're right. Another hand-shake, though, will do no harm, since, Captain Ashton, I begin to like you for your own sake. I don't, as a general habit, take in lodgers here, but I couldn't refuse my lady up at the Court.

But for her, I'd not have kept this snug roof over my head and Rose's head, in my old days. I was among a precious set of London land-sharks, who had pouched my hard savings I was fool enough to invest in one of their grand schemes; and it would have gone hard with old Job Trawl but for my lady and my lady's lawyers. They brought those smooth-spoken cormorants to reason, they did. And if a dog came to my door in Lady Larpent's name," added the old seaman, naïvely, "he'd be welcome to the best I've got."

Hugh's room turned out to be one of those quaint, enjoyable rooms, low-ceiled, lavender-scented, with the whitest of walls, and the most diamond-paned of windows, exquisitely clean and luxuriously homely, such as we look upon as essentially English, but which are growing scarce even in rural England now. The scent of the myrtles and old-world roses came floating in at the open window, and the linen was white and fair, as though it had been woven and bleached by fairies in the moon-kissed dew.

So was Rose Trawl, the old captain's grand-daughter, white and fair; quite a lady to look upon, Hugh thought, as she came forward to give her hand to the stranger guest, a little timidly. Some of 'Nezer's garrulity had related to Rose, and Hugh was prepared to expect a pretty girl but a vulgar beauty, like a cabbage-rose metamorphosed into the shape of a young woman. What he saw was a fair, slender maiden, with wistful, large eyes, and

superb hair, like a golden coil about her head.

"My only boy," said the old captain, gruffly, over his pipe, when supper was over, and the great lamp lit, and the two men were left alone together, "got lost, Cape Horn way. Carried stunsails, I expect, trusting to the beauty of the day just as if the beauty of the day didn't always spoil down there! 'Twasn't Will's fault. He was first officer, not captain. And I mind the captain well—a brisk seaman, but too much given to trust in luck. Anyhow, he left me this baby-girl to look after and to do my best for. His young wife, poor thing, just took on and dwindled awav."

Any reader who has had experience of that kind of man, can picture what Captain Trawl's parlour, wondrous similar to the cabin of a ship, looked like—the queer contrivances, the snugness, the cleanliness. the lockers let into the wall, the brasshilted cutlasses crossed over the chimneypiece, heavy with South Sea shells, and brain-like masses of white coral from the Pacific—the spears, the shields, the axes, the odd-looking stuffed fish, and feathers, and gourds, hanging by nails from the wall. All was neat, bright, and shining, from the kettle on the hob to the glossy coat of the cat that purred contentedly before the "spark of fire" which the captain's rheumatics rendered necessary after sundown.

A sturdier, an honester, or a meeker man than Captain Job Trawl, who had been round and round the world, and who had simmered in the sun or shivered in the cold of nearly every part of our globe's surface, it would be hard to find. A merchant sailor always, first apprentice, next before the mast, presently mate, and then captain, he had sailed and he had fought—as the Malay pirate's sword-cut across his hand testified—but he had kept the same simplicity of heart, child-like faith, and manly shrewdness, from first to last. He was to be seen every Sunday in the scantily attended parish church—scantily attended because the steaming chapels were thronged—just as he had been when a chubby boy, before he went to sea. He farmed a bit, and lived partly on his hard-won savings, or the interest of them, and was, in a quiet way, a personage at Treport.

"I like ye, lad!" he said once or twice, frankly enough, to Hugh, during their talk. "I began to fear, to tell you the truth, more than once that my lady yonder had made a mistake about the Western Maid. But you are a seaman!"

"Of a sort, I am," answered Hugh, modestly. "Not to compare with your experience, though, Captain Trawl."

"But the queerest thing of it seems to me, as I look at you," said the superannuated skipper, "that you look a gentleman too."

"That can hardly be!" answered Hugh Ashton, with a laugh.

"Well, it may be that my old eyes are getting dim," rejoined the elder mariner; "but anyhow, you seem a fine young fellow, Captain Ashton; and I wish you luck of your early promotion, and your fair start in life. My lady's good-will is worth

having. And you'll not have long to wait before you get affoat as commander of the Western Maid. The watchers have been out these four days on every height from Start to Deadman's."

"The watchers?" inquired Hugh.

"For the pilchard-fishery," explained Captain Trawl. "You're a stranger here; but most likely you have heard that this is our chief harvest, here along the Cornish coast, the catching of the fish that are to go, in keg and firkin and hogshead, out to Spain, and Portugal, and Italy, and wherever them good Catholics tell their beads. I've seen our Cornish pilchards out Buenos Ayres way, and at Rio. We don't sell 'em, except foreign. And the Western Maid will be wanted to help in shooting nets and hauling seines home, when the shoals come

# 126

#### YOUNG LORD PENRITH.

in. Depend upon it, she's lying with fires banked, and a spring on her cable, ready for the signal, and Long Michael, the mate, in a worry. And here "—as a heavy step came up the garden-walk—"here is Long Michael!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

#### THE WATCHERS.

Long MICHAEL, first officer, according to modern euphuisms, of the Western Maid, certainly deserved his distinctive appellation, being immoderately tall, high-shouldered, lean, and lathy of build. Even in Kentucky his unusual height would have attracted notice, and the more so, perhaps, because of the apologetic and somewhat bashful bearing that was familiar to him, as though he felt himself

to blame for the superabundance of his inches. He was nearer to fifty years than forty; and had a hardy, weather-beaten face that contrasted oddly with his mildness of manner, as he stood, hat in hand, in Captain Trawl's parlour.

"You're welcome, Captain," said the grizzled mate of the steamer, as, with indescribable awkwardness, he made a sort of bobbing bow to his young commander. "I've taken the liberty, ye see, to come up here, with Captain Trawl's good leave, to report the Western Maid ready for sea. We 'm got the fires banked up; but we could get a goodish head of steam in a matter o' seventy minutes after signal."

Hugh shook hands with his gigantic subordinate.

"I feel more than half ashamed," he said,

in his frank way, "at the notion of giving orders to an older and more experienced seaman like yourself, the more so, as all this pilchard business, which my kind friend, Captain Trawl here, was trying to explain to me, is just so much Greek to a newcomer such as I am. It seems hardly fair that I shall have to depend on your goodnature to teach me my work."

Long Michael's honest face glowed with mingled shame and satisfaction, and he shuffled his great feet to and fro like a bear on a heated floor.

"No trouble, Cap.—none at all," he returned, coughing behind his broad hand, as he looked benignantly down at Hugh from under the pent-house of his grizzled brows. "Tain't possible now to get to know your bearings all at once when you

cruise in strange waters, and our Cornwall coast and its ways must in course be puzzling to a stranger at first. I've been a Channel groper myself, I have, man and boy, for nearly forty year; and even in a fog I think I could feel my road about somehow; but that comes of practice. Before winter and the wreck-weather come upon us, the skipper will be used to steamer, and used to coast; won't he, Captain Trawl?"

Hugh's host assented to this proposition, remarking that the pilchard-fishing was a nice easy job to begin with, and that the new skipper was in luck to get afloat so early. As he spoke, he mixed a glass of "something" for the mate; and Long Michael—ceremoniously preluding his draught by saying, "Your good health,

captains both—Yours, Miss Rose, I'm sure!"—sipped the steaming compound with modest enjoyment of its fragrance. Meanwhile old Captain Trawl related how, so anxious had been the vigilance of the fishermen that day, that the very bugles of the coaches on the roads skirting the sea had been silenced; and that there had been an order given to postpone the firing of "shots" in certain quarries that stood but a little above high-water mark, lest the precious visitants should be scared away.

"There be they that say," observed the old seaman, dogmatically, "fish have no ears. Anyhow, a drum, or a gun, or so much as the squeak of a fiddle in a ship's foc'sle, is enough to head back the whole drove on 'em. And if pilchards fail,

there'll be cold hearth-stones, and children crying for hunger, in many a village from St. Mary's to the Seal Rocks. They're a bit latish this year."

Presently the mate said good night, and departed, not, as he explained, to "turn in regular," but to lie down, waiting for the summons to action. He recommended his new commander to do the same.

"One of the lads'll run, once the cry's given, Cap.," he said; "and 'twill be as well for the men's tempers—asking your pardon for the freedom—not to keep them waiting over long."

Hugh followed his lieutenant's wellmeant advice, and, lying down full-dressed on the spotless little bed with its snowwhite curtains, slept as he had slept on many a night when the war-cry of the savage, or the howl of storm-wind through the rigging, was likely to awaken him, ready to spring up at the first call. But the pilchards were capricious, and Hugh's slumbers were undisturbed. Even at dawn no cry burst forth from jutting crag or hill-top. The morning passed quietly away, and Hugh began to fret at the delay which doomed him to inaction. His own desire had been, as was natural, to go up to the Court at as early an hour as the habits of gentlefolks permitted, and to pay his thanks to his benefactress in person for the great kindness she had rendered him. But old Captain Trawl was strongly against his going up to Llosthuel.

"Suppose you to be absent there, my bo',' he said, "and the cry to sound, and the Western Maid to be waiting for her skipper, and perhaps a thousand barrels lost through that. Even my lady wouldn't like it."

But at last, as the dreamy, golden morning went on, Hugh could no longer endure the suspense; and he was in the act of sallying forth from the garden-gate, when a breathless lad in red shirt and Flushing serge ran hurrying up.

"Cap'en Ashton! They want you, sir. Long Michael, the mate, bid me say they've signalled."

Clear and distinct to Hugh's ear came through the distance the far-off cry from cliff and crag: "Fish, ho!"

"I'll not keep them waiting for me," answered Hugh. A boy can run better than a man; but it was all that the young apprentice could do to keep abreast of

his commander as they traversed the cobble-stoned streets and emerged upon the quay.

"Yon's Western Maid!" cried the

There were vessels in plenty in Treport harbour, or, in local parlance, quay-pool, on that day, over and above the Western Maid. No steam-ships, it is true, but a pack of fishing-craft, with red sails, brown sails, white sails, hastily getting ready for sea, and being hauled and towed out of harbour, bronzed, black-bearded giants springing on board, women, striplings, and children buckling to the tow-rope. The Western Maid had steam up by this, and lay alongside the harbour snorting like some angry crocodile in the Egyptian mud. Her crew were bustling, like alarmed wasps,

to and fro. There was no landing-stage ready, no gangway manned, none of the preparation which we see in passenger steamers. Hugh caught hold of a rope and swung himself on board, dropping from the quay to the deck more deftly than did the ship's boy who followed him.

"That's something like! Cap. be a sailor, I see that," muttered several who saw the act, men and women alike; for women along that storm-beaten western coast are smart critics and severe judges of what a man who grapples with the all-devouring sea should be to make him worthy of such a foe. There was nothing, so far as the natives of Treport could observe, to object to in Hugh Ashton. A stranger he was, a "foreigner" in local

speech; no Cornishman, not of the "one and all" of the famous mining, fishing, wrestling county that was once a king-dom.

But that was the head and front of his offending; and, once pardoned on that score, he promised to make friends rapidly on the strength of his own merits. That he was a gallant young man was clear—lithe, active, taller than any of his crew save Long Michael, and one son of Anak, who, however, was from Beer, of smuggling fame, in the bordering shire of Devon.

"Bustle about, lads! Clear away there! Take the helm, my man, will you! And you, boy, run below, and tell the engineer to be ready to put her at quarter-speed till we're out of port!" ordered Hugh; and Long Michael, whose generous soul

was aglow with pleasure at finding his young superior equal to the situation, seconded these orders with all the zeal he could muster.

"Wish ye luck, Captain!"—"Good luck, skipper!" said twenty rough, and as many shrill voices from the pier, as the steamer glided out. Hugh waved his cap in reply. The sunbeams glinted on the young man's dark hair, and proud, handsome head, as he stood gracefully, and quite at home, on his deck.

"Looks as if he'd been born a skipper," was the word in many a humble home that day when Hugh was mentioned.

The Western Maid slid softly out to sea, the helmsman's main difficulty being to avoid fouling any of the red-sailed smacks that were creeping out of Treport, or making their slow way, like so many wetwinged moths, across the heaving sea, under the pressure of the tantalising breeze that was not steady for ten minutes at a time.

"Cap.," said Long Michael, sidling up to Hugh, "we'm safe out o' harbour, and that's thanks to you. Let me tell 'ee between ourselves that if you'd rubbed a penn'orth of paint, or so much as rattled a block, off one o' them smacks, they'd have grumbled—men are that onreasonable. And if I'd stood by you, sir, and helped, they'd ha' grumbled then, and said: 'Old Michael be a dry-nursing him to know the sea.' That ain't true, Cap., for you've been long-voyage; hevn't ye?"

"Long enough! Four months, once, whaling and sealing in the Antartic Sea," answered Hugh, with a smile.

"But," said Michael, argumentatively, 
"you can't know the Channel, and specially our pilcharding, without bein' taught, no more than I knows Commodore Johnson's 
Greek Dictionary, or whatever it is, by the right name of it. Now here we are slick out, ready to help; but we mustn't go too fast."

"Why too fast?" asked Hugh, surveying the sea.

"Because," the mate made answer,

"we're no more good by ourselves than a
mill is, bless ye, when there be no grist to
grind. We'm got no nets to shoot. All
we can do, I reckon, is to help them that
has. There's two ways we can do that.

Take the boats in tow—that's one; but they're all loath to pay for that so long as there's a breath to fill the sails; and I can't blame them. Tother way is surest. We can tow nets inshore to beach, and get the pilchards landed, when, but for us, tons' weight of the shiny things would break away and get lost. But there's them as be mortal jealous of our steamers. Some of the free fishers be. Enterprisers be more so."

In answer to Hugh's inquiries, Long Michael at once informed him of the existence of certain irregular associations on the Cornish coast called Enterprisers, the members of which were fishermen who fished in unison.

"Twarn't bad at the beginning," explained the mate. "The idea war not a

bad one. The men, ye see, Cap., had been ground down by the Jowders, and they was sore against them.—You don't know, sir, what a Jowder is. Well, I'm sorry to say he's a precious old rascal that buys fish, and buys it on his own terms, having money in hand, and fishers none, and Jowders hanging together to keep down prices. was natural the owners of boats should wish to help one another and be free of the Jowders, and sell all at one rate, and get a smack out of bay in case of need, and be like brothers. But the Jowders—cunning old sea-dogs!—they bided their time, they did; and through having one man under their thumb, and lending to another, and what not, Enterprisers are obliged to bid them fair, they be."

Long Michael went on to say that Jow-

ders and Enterprisers were combined in a strong dislike to the steam vessels of the Western Tug and Salvage Company; the former because their co-operation at critical moments tended to cheapen the price of fish; and the latter on account of that unreasoning jealousy which uneducated Labour has at all times exhibited towards Science backed by capital.

"There have been riots north-west way agin the use of steam," Long Michael said; "and, though there's been none o' that among our chaps, it's best not to thwart their prejudices. If the shoals war to turn tail, and we be near, they'd lay all the weight of it on the Western Maid. So we'm better keep a good offing, Cap., until the pilchard drove be well inshore, and every seine cracking with the netted fish;

and then they'll be glad to call us to their help, and won't grudge the pay neither.— Yon's the lighthouse; and there, beyond the Point, that's St. Mary's Bay. Once the shoal gets well in, their own pressure will keep them moving; and sometimes girls and boys from the beach can wade into the shallows, and get them in creels and caps and anything, they're that thick.—Keep her away, Peter Mawgan, d'ye hear!—And I think the engines had better stop altogether; not the steam-head, though. We'll want speed when the hurry comes."

## CHAPTER IX.

## IN ST. MARY'S BAY.

Toften happens that sportsmen, with all appliances and means to boot, find the time hang heavily on their hands. It is not cheerful, the hour spent on damp heather, beneath a grey rock in the Highlands, before experienced Donald comes to pronounce that, if the wind does not shift and nothing happens, fifty minutes of penitential crawling among stony places may bring one within rifle-range of a browsing VOL. I.

stag. Those half-hours spent beside the outer edge of a dense wood, within which the hounds give spasmodic yelps, and whence a fox may break in any conceivable direction but the right one, are the reverse of enlivening. And so it is, sometimes, in business. Hugh Ashton, for one, was bent on business. Yet it tormented him that the Western Maid lay so steady on the sea, gently heaving, but otherwise absolutely motionless.

In the Mediterranean the weather would but have harmonised with the scenery and the surroundings. There would have been the violet sea, the violet sky, the sharp outlines of the coast, the thin transparent air, bringing remote objects near to us, that some of us know so well. But in West Cornwall it was entirely different. There Nature's alchemy gave a blended haze of gold and silver and sapphire, of mist and haze, and brightness and shimmer, prettier, softer, more vague, than anything on which southern eyes ever rested.

Long Michael kept strict watch. The crew were eager and ready. The sooty gnomes below hatches were prepared to "fire up" at a word; but for weary hours the word remained unspoken, and the pilchards declined to come in. Something—who could tell what?—had frightened the scouts of the gleaming shoal, and the whole army, clad in silver mail, kept out in deep water and hesitated to advance. They might head back altogether. They might trend off towards France or Wales. They might hang for weeks about the Land's End, thinned by the multitudes of dog-fish

and porpoises that tracked them as wolves track sheep, and then be broken up and dispersed by the rough weather of the equinox. Their presence meant comfort to humble dwellings. Their absence meant the pinch of poverty.

"Fish, ho!" They were coming closer in. The shrill cry from watchers who, with straining eyes, craned over crags and clung to projecting stones; a shrill cry that boded well.

Hours went by. Hundreds of red sails, white sails, brown sails, dappled the sea, and scarcely came a breath to stir them. There was a golden film like gilt gossamer over the softly heaving sea. There were, to artists, impossible effects of green and silver in the western distance.

While awaiting the call to activity, Hugh

Ashton had time enough to inspect the vessel under his command. The Western Maid was a trim little steamer, only too elegant in her build and coquettish in her neatness, as some might have thought, for the humble sphere of her vocation. A tugboat is usually a rusty, bluff-bowed little prodigy of useful ugliness, puffing volleys of Acherontic vapour from her stumpy smokestack, and churning up the waves with grimy paddle-wheels.

"All my lady's doings!" said the mate, in reply to Hugh's remarks on this point. "She insisted that the Board should contract with a firm of famous shipbuilders, instead of buying, as the rest wanted to do, a brace of cheap tubs, second-hand. And she keeps us as taut and smart as a recruiting-sergeant in his ribbons, just as she will

have patent ploughs and steam-thrashers and improved drain-tiles on her property. Some folks grumble, but my lady does a mort o' good."

It was evident that Long Michael was a loyal vassal to the autocratic Dowager up at Llosthuel. It was none the less manifest that he was a thoroughly good fellow, without an atom of malice or envy at the bottom of his honest heart. That he should resent a younger man's being put over his head, while he still remained mate of the steamer, would have been unjust, probably, but extremely natural. Such was not, however, Michael's own way of regarding Hugh's promotion.

"I'm no scholar," he said, modestly; "never could get the pith and marrow out of a printed book. And, though I can

scuffle along, I can't navigate, and never sailed foreign but once, when I was cabin-boy aboard a Plymouth barque out in the Azores for oranges. A mate's berth's the right sort for me."

It was deep in the afternoon, and the sloping sun had flung a royal highway of burnished gold across the mysterious waters to the west, before a shriller scream than had been heard before came pealing from the cliffs. "Fish, ho!" The cry was caught up, echoed, repeated, confirmed from crag to crag. Not a doubt of it, the shoals were coming in. Still there was no hurry. The Armada of fishing-vessels lay motionless yet, as prudence dictated, until at length a fresh call, louder, wilder, more jubilant than before, rang out: "In shore! Fish, ho!" And then there was no more

silence, no more inaction. Every sail was trimmed to make the most of the faint breeze that blew in catspaws, ruffling the water, and then dying away. Out came the heavy sweeps, tugged at by sturdy arms, to force the lugger along through the still sea. Oar and sail did their best: but it was late; and the declining sun burned crimson in the distance, before the leading smacks were able to form in crescent order. and spread their acres of net for the insnarement of the finny spoil. Loud shouts from time to time resounded. There was little need for caution now. The fish, fairly embayed, could easily be cut off from their line of retreat to the depths of ocean.

Hugh, new to this animated scene, chafed at the delay; while the crew bustled feverishly to and fro, longing to join in the onslaught on the pilchards; but Long Michael shook his grizzled head.

"Wait till we're wanted, Cap.," he said.

"There's chaps among the Enterprisers would find fault, and perhaps law the Company, if our very wash put a net awry.

Plenty of work for all!"

At last, when the twilight was darkening into evening gloom, came over the waters the far-off hail: "Ahoy! steamer! Western Maid, ahoy!"

"Now it's our turn, Cap.," said Michael, cheerily; and, with engines working at reduced speed, the steamer threaded her way into St. Mary's Bay, crowded with sails of many colours. A picturesque scene it was. On shore, fires were burning brightly, and torches gleamed with ruddy light, and

excited groups of workers ran hither and thither, or clustered thickly around the fires; for there is always work in plenty to be done before the captured fish can be stowed away, layer above layer, in barrels neatly headed, branded, and ticketed for exportation. The curing, the packing, and the conveyance of the spoil give employment for the time to many hundred people.

But the chief interest to Hugh's unaccustomed eye was in the spoil itself, in the live silver that leaped and struggled, striving to burst the nets; trying to slip through the meshes; and sometimes, by dint of sheer weight, breaking through the cruel toils that environed the glittering captives by myriads: There was hauling and dragging; there were orders hoarsely shouted; the bronzed giants

in sea-boots and blue or red shirts, bending their brawny backs over the gunwale, have enough to do; the boys tug, gasping, at the ropes. There is much talk, some reproach, a trifling amount of praise, and some strong language, since nobody at pilchard-fishing, as in a storm, picks his words.

Long Michael was the guiding spirit as concerned the Western Maid's share in the work to be done. Work that must be done, like Ariel's spiritings, gently. Well done, nameless engineer below, whose fine touch played on the levers that kept the Western Maid's throbbing heart of steam precisely at the right speed, stopping now, stealing on a pace, and anon forging ahead, just as skilled organist brings out the powers of his instrument! Well steered, helms-

man, whose dexterous hand and watchful eyes were never for an instant idle! And well managed, honest Michael, to whom it would have been so easy to discredit his young chief by the negligence of a moment had there lurked a spark of malevolence in his honest mind, but who had never been so careful that no shadow of blame might attach to the repute of the steamer, as on the maiden day of Hugh's new command!

The steamer had helped, and helped well, to further the work that evening. Overgorged seines, full to the throat with struggling fish, had been, by her gentle but resistless force, drawn to shore. Smacks lying helpless on the still sea had been by her towed into snug stations. And Long Michael, exact in business matters as he was

careful in affairs of seafaring, had got fromevery boat's skipper the due acknowledgment that would enable the Company to claim what was fairly owing for help in time of need.

At length the work was done. The last of the weighty nets had been dragged heedfully over reef and shingle to dry land. The packers and curers were as busy as flies around honey. The fires blazed. The dark figures of those who toiled around them flitted to and fro across the patches of flickering light like images of a magic-lan-Suddenly in the glare of the torches appeared a group of sight-seers, at once distinguishable by their garb and bearing from the bulk of those around. There were several ladies and two or three gentlemen.

"Quality, no doubt, come down to see a sight worth looking at, as happens most years when the day's a fine one," said Long Michael. "Yes, yon's my lady herself in front—Lady Larpent, I mean," he added, thinking that Hugh had not understood his words. But already Hugh Ashton had caught sight of the graceful girlish form at the Dowager's side, and he had scarcely eyes or ears for any other sight or sound than Maud's face, Maud's voice.

Hugh sprang into a boat, one of several boats that were alongside the steamer, and in a minute was on shore. Lady Larpent smiled and nodded with unaffected pleasure as the new commander of the Western Maid came up to offer her his thanks for her generosity, and to explain the reasons which

had prevented him from already presenting himself at Llosthuel.

The Dowager, who, like most of her sex, was much influenced by external advantages, acknowledged to herself that the young man looked singularly handsome, as he came up to meet the party from the Court, and that he played the difficult part of being grateful, without a touch of servility, very well. The gold-laced cap that he lifted in salute became him well, when it rested on his dark hair and broad forehead. The boys, Edgar and Willie, were demonstrative, in boyish fashion, as to their welcome. Maud was very silent; but she put out her little hand, by a quick impulsive feeling, for Hugh to take; and Sir Lucius frowned till his dark brows met ominously as he noted this.

picturesque spectacle," said Dowager, looking around her. "I have often seen it before; but to some of us-to my niece in particular—it is a novel sight." Then Lady Larpent proceeded to say that it was growing late and dark, and that there was a long homeward drive in prospect, and presently the party from the Court returned to the carriages in waiting near the beach. "I shall be happy to see you, Mr. Ashton-Captain Ashton-at Llosthuel tomorrow, if you can find the time to come," said the Dowager, graciously. And so the carriages drove off. And thus did Hugh Ashton and Maud Stanhope meet again.

## CHAPTER X.

## AT MIDNIGHT.

THE steamer Western Maid, belonging to the Tug and Salvage Company, was on her homeward trip to Treport, her natural home and harbour. It had been black night long before she could leave St. Mary's Bay, and even now she had a leash of smacks in tow, each laden gunwale deep with shining oily fish, destined one day. to be the solid pièce de résistance at many a frugal meal in Spain or Portugal. These VOL. I.

pilchards were to be cured and barrelled at Treport, not at St. Mary's, and therefore the skippers were willing to pay for the coals that had to supplement the coy Atlantic breeze. Long Michael, the mate, very tired, more fatigued, indeed, than he cared to own, had turned in below, and was sleeping the sound sleep that attends honest toil. His young captain had insisted on taking upon himself the night-watch, as they ran slowly up the coast back to harbour.

Hugh Ashton, a poor fisherman and letter-out of pleasure-boats in a Welsh lake-side village but a few weeks since, to-day commander of a pretty coasting craft, walk-ed, the deck with the assured step of one who had trodden ships' planks many a time beneath quite other constellations than

those pale homely stars that twinkled above him in the familiar English sky. There was the Bear, and there was Charles's Wain, there Orion's Belt, and there the Pole Star; but where was Canopus, one blaze of yellow flame, and where the Southern Cross that lent hope to the first discoverers of island-continents hidden amidst the unploughed waters of the far Pacific?

Hugh paced slowly to and fro. There was a good steersman at the helm. The look-out ahead was briskly kept. The proper lights were burning bright. At intervals—for there was a vapour that hung hazily, half fog, half shade, over the sea—the steam-whistle sounded. Small risk of a collision, either with smacks working home to Treport, or with ships bound up

Channel, on so calm a night, and with such precautions; yet Hugh kept his eyes open, and scanned sea and sky in his walk, as a seaman should.

By-and-by there arose, like a lover's sigh, a breath of western wind, and it lifted the fog-curtain in a moment, like some decoration of a theatre, and left the pale dark sea, with its thousand ripples and wrinkles, clearly visible. Not a craft was to be seen save the three in tow astern of the Western Maid. As yet Treport lights were not to be descried. There was the Head to round first; and on the Head burned, as usual, the revolving red light that showed the mariner where he was, and had saved many a life and much cargo, and many a stout ship from being ground to powder among Cornish rocks.

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Hugh Ashton, walking the deck of his own ship for the first time, might have been pardoned had his air and step indicated some elation due to his sudden rise in life. He had, partly through the caprice of a rich old woman, partly through his own merits, abruptly mounted several rungs of the great ladder up which we are all supposed, with less or more of alacrity, to climb, and push, and jostle, and worm our way. is no mighty authority or lofty station which the command of a tug-steamer confers; but still the appointment to such a post was high promotion to a poor toiler for daily bread. Yet the young man's dark, handsome face was thoughtful, and even stern, as he paced to and fro, never so deeply absorbed in his reverie as to forget the vigilance that befitted his position.

Steady and gentle was the Western Maid's progress towards Treport, the still sea growing lambent with phosphorescent light, that glowed mysteriously in watery depths, or sparkled into flashes as the surface rippled at the touch of the breeze. Often had Hugh Ashton marked that living light on a grander scale than this, in the far-off Indian Ocean, or on the glassy spread of the Pacific, where the tiny creatures, glowworms of ocean, that yield it, swarm in millions beyond the dream of an arithmetician; but never had it so impressed him as on that night, his first experience of his novel position of responsibility and trust. He glanced upwards, and his lips moved, in prayer we well may deem; and then, with the same steady tread and air of quiet watchfulness, he resumed his solitary walk.

Presently Hugh Ashton halted beside the binnacle, and drawing from an inner pocket of the coat he wore a thin packet, proceeded to undo the wrapper, and examine the contents. There were five or six letters. old, all of them, since the paper was slightly yellowed, and the ink faded. There was also a little diary or memorandum-book, most of the pages of which were covered with a fine close handwriting. It was evident, from the manner in which the young man glanced his eyes over these, that the purport of the documents was sufficiently familiar to him, and that he only consulted them now with the object of refreshing his memory as to minor details. It was with

a heavy sigh that he closed the book, and, carefully folding the letters, replaced the packet within its wrapping of stout paper.

"A sacred duty!" murmured Hugh, as he thrust the little parcel back into its former place of concealment. "Not lightly undertaken, not easy to perform; but I will never flinch from it, or be false to it, so Heaven help me at my utmost need! was beside his grave at Bala that I made my vow, that my resolve shaped itself into a fixed and steady purpose. Poor father! A gentler purer soul never yet left this earth than his, who bore through half a lifetime uncomplaining what it fires my blood to think of! He shall be righted yet. His innocence, his good name, and fair fame shall be established, or I will live and die-as I am!"

"Treport lights, Captain!" said the man at the wheel, gruffly, as they rounded the Head, and came in sight of the town. And Hugh stepped aft, and chatted for a while good-naturedly with the steersman, until Long Michael, rubbing his eyes, came drowsily on deck.

"You would have me turn in, Cap.," said the mate, bashfully, and then added: "You're as bright as a beagle, without even forty winks, skipper!"

Hugh laughed.

"I learned to do without sleep," he said, cheerily, "unless convenient, when I was among the head-hunting Dyaks of Borneo. But if I'd had your work yesterday, mate—we may call it yesterday now—I should have been drowsy enough. You slaved,

Michael, to make my first day's labour seem like a holiday."

Long Michael, permanent mate, as it seemed, of the good steamship Western Maid, reddened and chuckled as he took his young commander's offered hand, and wrung it in a grasp that would have crushed and galled some joints and fingers sorely.

"I'm glad, Cap., if I've eased it off a bit!" was all the worthy fellow said; and then he bestirred himself, that the entering Treport quay-pool should be as prosperous as the outward cruise had been.

It was late, or rather early—since the church clock had struck two while he was traversing the ill-paved streets—when Hugh Ashton reached his lodgings. He had no latch-key. Houses such as Captain Trawl's

pretty white cottage, in counties so remote as that of Cornwall, are seldom provided with latch-keys for the accommodation of bachelor indwellers.

'Nezer, the dwarf factorum, who, with a raw-boned elderly woman from the town or village of Treport, did the roughest of the work, opened the door when Hugh knocked, and Neptune bounced and barked a conplimentary reception.

"He's larned to like ye a'ready, Nephas!" grumbled the dwarf, half grudgingly.

"The dog don't take to some and all, Master Ashton, I can tell 'ee, on so short an acquaintance, he don't."

To Hugh's dismay, he found his host, the superannuated captain, and his grandchild, sitting up for him, and supper prepared. "We heard," said the veteran, "as how it had been a good catch; and a good catch is a blessing from heaven to us poor coastfolk here. It's not for myself that I speak. I've enough, thanks to God, for the evening of my old life, and to leave Rose here comfortable when I am asleep in Treport churchyard. But I feel as if I couldn't rest in my bed when fishermen's little ones are fractious and pining for want of a meal. All's right now; and so, Captain, tell us all about it."

It was late before the old man would allow his guest to retire for what was left of the night. Hugh said, modestly, but with perfect truth, that his own part in the business of the day had been scarcely more than that of a spectator. And he praised Long Michael warmly as the real discharger

of the duties of commander of the Western Maid. But his audience did not appear to be easily kindled to enthusiasm on the subject of the steamer's mate.

"Ay, ay!" Captain Trawl would say, in answer to Hugh's hearty encomiums. "A good seaman and an honest lad is that Long Michael of ours."

But that was all. And pretty Rose smiled pityingly as she spoke of poor Michael's trick of blushing, and of his huge hands and clumsy feet. Presently the conversation drifted away from Cornwall and pilchards to wild people and tropical scenery at the other side of the world; and the two captains, old and young, compared their reminiscences, Captain Trawl as charmed to have found a good listener in Hugh as ever was Scott's Antiquary with his

phœnix, Mr. Lovel; while Rose hearkened, breathlessly attentive, to the few short anecdotes of adventure that their young guest related.

Hugh Ashton, when at length he fell asleep in his neat little room upstairs, with the scent of flowers in the garden below stealing up to his lattice through the still autumnal air, dreamed of a female form that floated, vaporous and indistinct, over the murmuring sea. Sometimes the shadowy presence wore the features of Maud Stanhope; and anon Maud's beautiful face would fade away, and be replaced by the wistful blue eyes and golden hair of Rose Trawl. And then he was in a church, where a bridal company had gathered. He—Hugh—was the bridegroom; but the veiled bride, who stood with her face

averted, who was she? Just as he sought to clasp her hand in his, a wild ghastly form, draped in the cerements of the grave, rose shrieking, to forbid the blessing to be spoken; and Hugh awoke, to find the early light of day streaming into the room. It was morning, and he had other things to do than to dwell upon the phantasies of the night. On that day he was free to go up to Llosthuel Court, and pay his respects to Lady Larpent.

## CHAPTER XI.

## YOUR FORTUNE.

IT is a steep though winding road which leads up from Treport, low-lying, as a harbour must perforce be, to the bold heights on which Llosthuel Court is perched. And the latter occupies, as regards the former, at once an ostensibly commanding and a protecting position, dear to the appreciative mind of the Dowager who dwelt there. It is very improbable that the Penhuels, when they chose that site for

their abode, thought very much of scenery or effect. The picturesque had not as yet been invented, and people planted their dwellings where they were snug or safe, without much thought for anything but warmth or convenience. It was enough in those days that Llosthuel was out of reach of the pirates, Moslem or Christian, who sometimes made a dash at the exposed coast of Cornwall, even so late as Charles I.'s reign, and that it lay adjacent to the cream of the property, farm and mine, on the high table-land that towered majestically aloft.

Up this winding road, Hugh Ashton, walking briskly, but pausing now and then to drink with his eyes the beauty, new to him, of the landscape that lay within his range of vision, made his way. The road

led past steep meadows, where the active little Cornish cows had to display mountaineering qualities as they browsed: past barren banks, amidst the stones of which a querulous goat occasionally tugged at the rope that tethered it; and then among rocks, mingling their gray scalps with the dark green of fir plantations. As he turned a rocky corner, the sound of two voices, apparently in altercation, fell upon his ear; one, which was raised in remonstrance, being sweet and soft, and emphatically that of a lady; while the other, harsh and petulant, could scarceiy be recognised as feminine.

"Let me pass you, please. I told you at first that I had no money with me. If you will come up to the house——" said the first voice.

"If I will come up to the house!" vehemently interrupted the other speaker. "You will sing another song then, sweet one, when there are men and maids to hasten to your call. Then it will be: 'To jail with the Bess o' Bedlam! Away with her, the gipsy thief and threatener—the cheat and cozener, that knows the inside of nigh every prison from Caithness to Cornwall!' No, no; I'm too grey and too old a weasel to be caught napping.—What's that you say?" she added, in a sort of shriek. "Alms, charity! Yes, a grudged sixpence and a basin of the thin soup that is good enough for the poor. No, no; I ask none such! Let the poor gipsy tell your fortune, pretty lady," continued the woman, with a sudden resumption of the fawning tone peculiar to itinerant soothsayers of the class

to which she presumably belonged. "Let me read your hand, as now I read your face, and tell you what the stars have in store for you; and as for payment, if you cannot cross my palm with silver, gold will do as well—that brooch, or those rings in your dainty ears, or——"

At this moment Hugh stepped forward, and came in sight of Maud Stanhope, evidently much alarmed, standing face to face with a wild-eyed, gaunt-faced woman, tall, grim, and menacing of aspect, whose ragged grey hair hung down from beneath a battered bonnet, and whose travel-stained and squalid garments were in part concealed by the yellow shawl, threadbare, but once no doubt of costly make, that was wrapped around her. The woman turned round at the sound of a man's footstep, and

snarled at Hugh like a wild cat balked of its prey.

"Oh, Mr. Ashton, I have been so frightened, perhaps foolishly!" exclaimed Maud, trying to smile, as she stepped forward.

Her tormentress stretched forth a bony hand, as if to bar the way.

"I'll have the yellow gold!" she hissed out.

"This is some poor crazy creature," said Hugh, advancing. "In any case," he added, "you must not annoy ladies, mother, please.

—I will see you safely, Miss Stanhope, to the house."

The gipsy, if such she was, as her swarthy complexion might have implied, recoiled with a scream of terror as Hugh drew near.

"Mr. George!" she exclaimed, with a

frenzied look of alarm, and stretching out her skinny hands, as if to shut out some horrid sight—"Mr. George!" And in an instant she was gone, striking into a sidepath among trees and rocks, which for pedestrians afforded a shorter cut to Treport than did the winding carriage-road. Scarcely had the echo of her steps died away before Sir Lucius Larpent, on horseback, and looking very indolent and handsome, came in sight, riding with a loose rein, and seeming, with his half-shut eyes and lounging air, as if he were only as yet half awake. He opened his eyes widely enough, however, and with a displeased glance as he saw who was Maud's companion.

"Why, cousin," he said, dismounting,

with an affected little laugh, "this is an unexpected pleasure.—Ah! Mr. ——Yes, Ashton, good morning to you." And he favoured Hugh with a nod, which the young commander of the Western Maid returned by a bow of coldest civility.

Now in point of fact Sir Lucius was not quite veracious in his late speech. He had expected to meet Maud, and on her account had given himself the trouble to be thus early abroad. But he had not expected to find Miss Stanhope in company with Hugh Ashton, for whom he had, even in Wales, conceived a profound dislike. His looks so clearly expressed his annoyance and surprise that Maud, although she owed her kinsman no sort of duty or obedience, was eager to explain what had occurred. Sir

Lucius listened to her narrative with a frigid politeness that was almost impertinent.

"So the beggar-woman frightened you, and you did not know how to get rid of her importunities; and this Mr. Ashton came up in the very nick of time, and drove her away. I envy his luck in turning up, as he always seems to do, in the character of a rescuer of young ladies."

This was sneeringly spoken, and the words were in themselves flippant and contemptuous. Hugh Ashton's sunburnt cheek flushed crimson; but he had great self-control, as a brave man usually has, and his voice was calm as he made answer:

"I am glad, Sir Lucius, that I did 'turn up' to-day when I did. It is not that I

believe Miss Stanhope to have been in serious danger—"

"There! that is candid, at least," interrupted the baronet, with a jeering laugh.
"Your hero, Maud, you see, admits there
was no danger but in your own imagination.
I suppose you thought your life itself in
peril from the claws and teeth of the
devouring dragon from whom he saved
you!"

"But," pursued Hugh, with forced composure, "I believe that, had no one arrived, Miss Stanhope would have been robbed of her ornaments, and might have sustained some hurt, too, at the hands of the madwoman who had waylaid her."

"Yes; I'm sure it is so!" exclaimed Maud, with some warmth. "And you are ungrateful and unkind, Cousin Lucius, not

to thank Captain Ashton, as I do, I am sure; and as Aunt Larpent will, for the service he has rendered me."

The mention of his imperious mother seldom failed to exercise a sobering effect over the evil temper of the baronet.

"I do thank Mr.—well, Captain Ashton, if you choose, for his opportune arrival," he said, smoothly. "And I apologise, if I seemed to speak lightly, at first, of your fright or of his assistance. You are agitated still, Maud, and would be better indoors. I will walk with you," he added, passing his horse's bridle over his left arm; "and we need not detain Captain Ashton any longer." And, if a look could have dismissed Hugh, Sir Lucius would have been left alone to escort his beautiful cousin to

the house. But Hugh did not choose thus to accept his dismissal.

"I was on my road to the Court," he said, "by Lady Larpent's desire, and my own wish. And, in any case, I mean to see Miss Stanhope safe home."

Therefore Maud Stanhope returned up the winding road under the guardianship of both these young men, one of whom was inwardly anathematising the presumption of the other. But what was Sir Lucius to do? He could not bid this young Ashton, as if he had been an English groom or a Highland gillie, follow with the horse and know his place. There was something of quiet dignity about Hugh's bearing which forbade aristocratic insolence to be pushed beyond a certain point, where he was con-

cerned. And he would not take a hint. Many a man in his position would have reddened and stammered, and said "Good morning" sheepishly, unable to face the baronet's haughty assumption of nonchalant superiority. But Hugh, though perfectly civil, was distressingly cool, to outward appearance at least, though in reality he chafed indignantly at the persistent hostility which Sir Lucius manifested towards him. Perhaps Maud, with a woman's quick instinct of perception, recognized this, for she was very gracious to Hugh during the walk, and, when the Court was reached, gave Lady Larpent a glowing account of her own alarm and of Hugh's welcome arrival to the rescue.

At Llosthuel Court Hugh Ashton became

again painfully aware of the subtle distinctions which a difference in rank creates. Out of doors, his social inferiority to Sir Lucius was not so marked as when, on entering the mansion, he was left standing by himself in the hall, while Maud and the baronet passed on towards Lady Larpent's favourite drawing-room. It is true that Miss Stanhope turned towards him, and said kindly that she would herself inform her aunt of his presence; but the fact remained, and Hugh stood there alone.

"I was a poor fisherman but yesterday," he thought to himself, half bitterly. "I am little better now, and have nothing to complain of. It was I who forgot."

Presently a servant came to usher him into a snug little study in which the Dow-

ager gave audience to visitors of humble degree.

"Lady Larpent told me to say she will see you directly," said the man.

Lady Larpent did not keep Hugh waiting for her very long. She sailed in, and was very good to him, and very gracious, thanking him for the recent service he had rendered to Maud, and receiving with royal affability the expressions of his gratitude for his appointment to command the Western Maid. With respect to her niece's recent adventure she was not so bland.

"It is unendurable," she said, knitting her strong brows, "that a lady staying in my house, and my relative, should be terrified and threatened within a few hundred yards of my gate. I shall send for the superintendent of police down at Treport there, and have the matter attended to at once."

- "I think, Lady Larpent, that the woman who stopped Miss Stanhope will prove to be insane," said Hugh.
- "Mad or not," rejoined the Dowager,
  "I am determined to prevent such conduct
  from being repeated in the future. My son,
  Sir Lucius, is very indignant also at the
  occurrence."

Then cake and wine were brought, and Lady Larpent insisted that Hugh should partake of both, and spoke cheerily to him as to his prospects, addressing him as "Captain" Ashton, and assuring him how glad she should always be to hear of his prosperity. And then Hugh took his

leave, not having the opportunity of again exchanging a word or look with Maud.

"It would have been fitter," said Sir Lucius, who, lounging beside a bay-window, saw Hugh's receding figure disappear in the distance, "if that confounded fisherman had come in at the back-door."

"You forget," said Maud, reproachfully, "the circumstances under which he accompanied us here, and what a debt we owe him."

And the Dowager coming in at that moment, Sir Lucius postponed any disparaging remarks concerning Hugh Ashton till another occasion. Meanwhile Hugh himself, as he strode down the winding road, was moody and deep in thought.

"I could not mistake the words. The name, it is true, is no uncommon one—and yet! I must find that old gipsy, wherever she may hide herself, and learn what her words meant."

VOL. I.

## CHAPTER XII.

## IN QUEST.

retired master-mariners of modest means and simple habits, dined early; and Hugh, who, it had been arranged, was to board as well as lodge with the old skipper's family, had to postpone the inquiries which he purposed making until the one o'clock dinner hour should be fairly sped. Then indeed he sallied forth, bent upon tracking down the half-crazed gipsy

whose greed and violence had affrighted Miss Stanhope in the course of her morning ramble on the Treport road. At dinner, he had been silent and thoughtful, and scarcely able to preserve an appearance of intelligent interest in old Captain Trawl's unfailsupply of salt-water stories. woman's strange words seemed ever to ring, with provoking dissonance, in his ears. "Mr. George!" There could be no doubt that, insane or not, the crone's terror at the sight of him, Hugh Ashton, was genuine enough. "Mr. George!" Hugh knew that he had been reckoned like his father. Perhaps the likeness was still more striking to one who had probably not seen that father since the days of his youth.

"Mr. George!" The tone in which that name had been uttered seemed to ring in

Hugh's ears, until he blamed himself for having allowed the weird, wild creature who uttered them to escape his questioning. At the time, it had appeared as if his duty were to see Miss Stanhope safely home. Now, the young man's conscience began to reproach him for his neglect of a deeper and a holier purpose. His father's image rose before him, and all things else were forgotten for the moment. He went out into the town. And now Hugh Ashton began to realise to himself what many a professional detective has felt, and which . chills the ardour of the most impetuous amateurs—the very great difficulty which attends the discovery of a needle in a bundle of hay. To follow a thief or other criminal red-handed, and on the impulse of the moment, is remarkably easy work.

That was the use of the old hue and cry, which, enlisting as it did in the hunt all who listened to the shouts of the pursuers, proved fatal, for several centuries, to all but the best-mounted highwaymen. When one man runs and another pursues, the instinct of our common humanity is to side with him who gives chase. But it is quite otherwise when the scent is cold, and bystanders are lukewarm or sceptical, and the burden of identification is tacitly thrown upon the seeker.

Treport was not the sort of town for such a search as that which Hugh contemplated. It was small, certainly, and could by the exhaustive process be easily explored. But it was oddly built, its four or five streets being intersected by straggling lanes and blind alleys, whence again there branched

off courts and stairs, wynds and closes. giving the small seaport the aspect, when minutely examined, of a sort of warren. Then, too, the inquisitiveness of the natives was calculated to waste the time and chafe the temper of one in Hugh's position. The worthy Cornish housewifes who stood at their respective doors, making the broom an excuse for a little neighbourly gossip with such of their acquaintance as were similarly engaged, proved themselves much readier to ask questions than to answer them, and manifested a pardonable feminine curiosity as to what Hugh Ashton's ultimate errand might be, or what he could possibly want with low lodginghouses and the dens where travellers with dusty feet and sticks and bundles were wont to take shelter.

"Trapezing foreigners o' that sort," said one tall matron, as she intermitted the operation of stringing pilchards and haddocks alternately to dry on a clothes-line stretched from wall to wall of her backyard. "I say, foreign vermin o' that sort don't get overmuch encouragement here, young man. There's Halket's, corner of Mill Lane, takes in trudgers. And there's another tramps' house o' call, Treloar's. That one will be harder for a stranger to find. Ye mun just gramp up Holloway, and ask any maid or brat ye see where old Giles Treloar lives. Take my advice, though, my lad, and the less ye has to do wi' such as they wanderers, the better for thee l"

This was valuable information, and Hugh hastened to avail himself of it. It was easy

to find Mill Lane, and not difficult to discover Halket's. A red-eyed, middle-aged woman, with fluffy hair, seemed the representative of that hospitable house of call for beggars.

"Not a gipsy," she said, staring at Hugh's dark suit and gold-banded cap, as she would have done at the wings of an angel. "That kind of customer don't come here. We've nobody, for trade be mortal slack, 'cept two singing sailors; and a blind; and a clarionet and his daughter; and the Mopus. That be all."

But Hugh quite forfeited all claim to respectful consideration by inquiring whether the Mopus were a man or a woman; in answer to which preposterous demand Mrs. Halket said, sharply: "The Mopus, out o' Devonshire!" and went off, growling about

greenhorns, to her mop and pail, much needed within her grimy dwelling.

Holloway—there are Holloways elsewhere than in North London—proved to be a deep lane, between banks of crumbling earth, where gardens were many, pig-sties plentiful, and cow-houses and cart-stables redundant, but where human habitations were sparse and unsavoury. Persistent questioning did at last produce the knowledge that a certain tumble-down house within a dilapidated paling, and standing amidst a congeries of distorted cabbages and seedling onions, was the residence of "Muster Treloar." On approaching this delectable house of entertainment, over the door of which a tolerant magistracy had permitted to subsist, in thin black letters, the inscription, "Licensed to"-here followed an elision—"drunk on the premises," Hugh thought to himself that he had never seen a place so desolate. Very few of the windows were thoroughly glazed, but either had had their panes stoned out, perhaps by recalcitrant lodgers resenting their expulsion from a place of rest, and so blinked blankly, or else had the missing glass supplied by slates, old hats, or bits of board, anything that would keep out the cold wind from indwellers more solicitous as to warmth than as to light or ventilation.

Out rushed the landlord, blatant and belligerent, angry as some huge hairy spider, a thread of whose web has been touched, as Hugh questioned a slip-shod urchin at the door.

"My name's Giles Treloar, young chap!"

exclaimed the proprietor, vehemently; "and I'm not ashamed of it. And I'll put a stop to your swaggerings about my place. And I'm ready for a round with you, for a fipun note, and let the best man win; I am, my buck! That for your gas!" he added, snapping his fingers and clumsily imitating the crow of a cock; "and that for your Company, young feller! Come on!"

Hugh laughed good-humouredly as the bulky, beery Mr. Treloar, who wore a white apron much besmirched, and who certainly seemed to have availed himself of his dubious license "to be drunk on the premises," lifted his puffy fists in pugilistic fashion. "I think," he said, quietly but firmly, as with his own powerful arms he pushed the puffy fists aside,

"that you have mistaken me for somebody else, Mr. Treloar."

The beer-shop keeper, whose name was Cornish, but whose accent and gestures were of Cockaigne, Cockney, stared at the stalwart young man in the nautical cap.

"I thought you were Gas Company," he said, with a sulky sort of half apology; "and they have riled me, they have, till I'm a baited bull with 'em. They talk of cutting, and County Courting! Let them County Court, and let them cut," he added, in the attitude of "Ajax defying the Lightning;" "but, if they send a paltry clerk or turncock round here any more, if I don't punch his head——"

"But you must not punch mine, you know," said Hugh, for the second time

repressing Mr. Treloar's warlike demonstrations. "And now, if you please, I want you to tell me whether you have a person with whom I particularly wish to have a word or two, as a lodger in your house. I don't know her name——"

"Then if you don't know her name," retorted Mr. Treloar, with considerable asperity, "what the dickens do you mean by prying about my place, asking for her?" And the beer-shop keeper added some exceedingly strong language regarding "spies" and "pryers," and a forcible description of the usage to which he would himself subject the eyes and limbs of such objectionable persons as should dare to come worrying after his lady and gentleman lodgers. "I'll have a round with you, young feller—five pounds a side, or twenty

—I'm your man, when you like!" hiccoughed Mr. Treloar, who was quarrelsome in his cups, and up went the puffy fists again. But Hugh Ashton caught the half-drunken bully in his strong grasp, swung him off his unsteady feet, and shook him until he saw dancing before his muddled eyes half-a-dozen young merchant captains, and half-a-dozen gold-banded caps, such as that which he had erroneously supposed to indicate an employé of the detested Gas Company.

Hugh Ashton propped the drunkard up against his rickety porch.

"Come, Mr. Treloar," he said, in the frank, ringing voice to which even a besotted creature like that before him could not be wholly insensible, "we need not quarrel. All I want of you is to know

whether a certain person, whom I can describe, but whose name I do not know, is now beneath your roof. I mean you no harm, and her no harm. But I do wish to speak to her, and I ask you to lend a hand to help me."

Mr. Giles Treloar shook himself into his ruffled garments, as a frightened fowl adjusts its disturbed plumage, and stared in a dull way at his conqueror. He was not angry. People whose brains swim with drugged beer are seldom angry, but often cross and sullen. The shaking seemed to have done the brute good, for it was in a milder tone that he said:

"You're a plucky one! If you'll tell me what sort of customer you're looking for, I'll do what I can for you."

Hugh described the grim, gaunt gipsy as

best he could, omitting all details as to her exploit of the morning.

"That's Ghost Nan!" replied the man, without hesitation. "They call her Ghost because of the way she has of popping up in her wanderings, sudden, at folks' elbows. She goes off, just so. Three nights she's slep here. To-day, before the dinner frying-pan's cold, she packs her bundle and off she starts, looking as if she'd seen the dead! I know she was going North, because—"

"Because?" echoed Hugh, eagerly. At that instant, up marched the stolid super-intendent of the Treport police, red-faced, tight-stocked, buttoned up to the throat in his dark-blue surtout, stupid embodiment of Law and Order.

"You, Giles Treloar," he said, "you've

got a female waggabone here, one Gipsy Nan or Ghost Nan, which my Lady Larpent has complained of, as threatening to rob a young lady at the Court. If you don't give her up immediately——"

"What!" screamed Mr. Treloar, with a reproachful look at Hugh. "A spy of the police be you, my smooth chap? Take that, ye curs!" And, rushing into his house, he slapped to the door, and drew the heavy bolts inside.

## CHAPTER XIII.

#### BAFFLED.

THE superintendent of the Treport police, tall, stolid, and angular, a man who was stiff enough of gait and bearing to have been mistaken for some curious automaton neatly turned by the lathe, and animated by clock-work, looked at Hugh, and Hugh looked at him.

"This won't do, you know," said the officer, with a shake of the head that was meant to be sagacious; and Hugh Ashton

assented by a cordial nod, albeit he began to fear that the superintendent's inopportune appearance on the scene had for everdried up the sluggishly flowing springs of Treloar's communicativeness. Mr. was himself half inclined to be angry with this lineal descendant of Dogberry, whose starched manners and brusque address had checked the welcome revelation that had seemed to be trembling on the lips of Giles Treloar, licensed beer-seller. But, after all, the wooden official was merely doing his duty in a wooden way, and it would be unreasonable to expect a tiny townette such as Treport to engage as the chief of its police a man of tact as well as energy.

"This won't do!" repeated the superintendent, encouraged by Hugh's nod; and

then he marched double-quick to the door; as rigidly erect as though he had been a soldier advancing under fire, and knocked smartly on the blistered panels. "This won't do, Mr. Treloar!" he said, in peremptory tones. "It's the authorities; and you are a publican, you are, and I will come in."

From the interior of the dismal dwelling, Mr. Treloar, emboldened by the impregnability of his barred and bolted door, and fully imbued with the constitutional doctrine that an Englishman's house is his castle, was heard, like an imprisoned Titan the worse for liquor, to howl forth hideous imprecations on the besiegers, coupled with direful threats as to the anatomical inconveniences to which those misguided persons should be put, in case the baiting process

were longer continued. And, from broken casements above, grim heads, male and female, were thrust forth to peer at the intruders, and there were mutterings of bad language, as if all Alsatia were about to break loose.

"This won't do!" repeated the superintendent—repetition has been a trick of dull people from Queen Anne downwards; but when he had promulgated the opinion that it would not do, he was fairly at a nonplus. There are things unusual and things illegal, to which at times, and under the pressure of necessity, even a superintendent in braided surtout, and with eight helmeted constables and a bestriped sergeant at his orders, must submit.

Giles Treloar was clearly in the wrong. He had that shadowy but formidable impersonation, the Law, against him. He could, by a competent authority, be fined all sorts of sums for all sorts of things—for profane swearing, which is an expensive vice, and costs the swearer five shillings, if strictly dealt with, per oath—for keeping a disorderly house, and for refusing admittance to the police.

But for the moment Giles Treloar, landlord of sturdy beggars and patron of mendicants, tramps, malingerers, impostors, and progging Abram-men, as the old statute used to call them, was practically victorious. His house was his castle. The superintendent, who had nothing but moral force to back him, turned with disgust to Hugh.

"He be a bitter bad one!" said the superintendent, sacrificing grammar for the

sake of emphasis; "that he be! But there's a Licensing Day!" he added, triumphantly, as anticipating the happy moment when Giles Treloar's signboard should be wrenched from the rusty nails that held it, and one ruffian the less should sell adulterated beer to Her Majesty's liege subjects.

But this was cold comfort to Hugh Ashton, who had no insulted authority to vindicate, and who cared nothing as to the future chastisement that might await the gipsy's host, if once he himself could gain an inkling of the gipsy's whereabouts.

"I don't see," said the superintendent, in dudgeon, "what we have to stop for."

In his professional anger, he seemed to include Hugh with himself, probably considering the young commander of the Western Maid as a fellow-sufferer from the contumacy of Giles the mutineer. Hugh assented, and the two invaders of the blissful demesne of Mr. Treloar retreated together from within the rotten paling, much derided by the squalid outlookers from the shattered windows.

"I'll draw up a proper statement; I'll punish him properly. Half their worships, anyhow, will back the police; and if Squire Robsart's gout——"

Thus much of the superintendent's speech Hugh did hear, but the rest was lost to him, and he had trouble enough to induce his irate companion to speak on any other subject than the misdeeds of peccant Giles Treloar.

"A tramps' house, that gives me more trouble than any crib in our limits," said

the fuming chief of the police. "How the justices ever came to grant the beer license, I can't think, though they did refuse the spirits. But he's a bad lot, that Treloar—a bad lot. Was up in London, and in the ring; no real prize-fighter, but one of those that sell a fight, drop at every blow, and betray the flats who bet upon them, for a brace of sovs sometimes. Been for short terms maintained at Her Majesty's cost. Wish it had been for long terms.—You're no Cornishman, I see, sir, any more than myself."

"I have hardly been three days in Cornwall. I come from Wales, though not a Welshman born; and I command a steamer here, the Western Maid," rejoined Hugh, smiling; "thanks to my kind friend, Lady Larpent."

"Then, Captain, I have heard of you," said the superintendent, putting, in military fashion, two stiff fingers stiffly up to his hard hat. "And I wish to be civil, I am sure, to a friend of Lady Larpent's. She was sharp with me to-day, she was; but then my Lady—I don't mind saying in confidence to you—has a temper. And 'dolt' is a strong expression. A lady of property and influence hasn't need to pick her words, of course, but 'dolt' is a strong expression."

Lady Larpent's vivacity of language evidently rankled in the policeman's mind, and the more so that he felt a sense of injury in the very fact that an inmate of Llosthuel Court should have been subjected to violence or threats.

"You see," said the superintendent, be-

coming confidential, "this is a queer county, and has got its ways. That people thieve a bit, I can't deny. But sober, that they are, right sober. A drink of milk, and a sermon in chapel, and a hymn, and there you have your Cornishman! He don't get intoxicated and obstruct thoroughfares, not he. The worst of the tramps don't go west of Plymouth. It's wonderful! violence on the Queen's high-road here; and it took Ghost Nan or Gipsy Nan to offer it."

"I saw the person of whom you speak this morning. I interfered, indeed, to protect Miss Stanhope, Lady Larpent's niece as I understand, from her wild talk and furious gestures. Do you know where she comes from, or who she is, Mr. Superintendent?"

"The police generally know something

about these waggabones," replied the official, consequentially; "but, Captain Ashton, I do not know as much as I could wish about the party in question, or she should see, not for the first time, what the inside of Bodmin jail looks like. A previous conviction does tell, somehow, with the Bench."

There was not much that was definite to be extracted from the chief of the local constabulary with reference to the antecedents or habits of Ghost Nan. It was a year or more since she had visited Treport. She was justly regarded as a woman of desperate character, and, if not mad, was at all events not far removed from the borderline of insanity. She had been in prisons and in asylums, and was rumoured to have been a thorn in the flesh and a vexation to the spirit of constituted authorities in every

shire of the West. Where she came from, nobody knew. There were some who believed her not to be really a gipsy, though she gained her livelihood for the most part, as gipsies do, by telling fortunes to silly servant-maids. Fortune-telling being too precarious a profession on which to rely alone, Ghost Nan was supposed to eke out the profits of her pretended knowledge of the future by various light-fingered practices, such as the stealing of linen left to dry, the uttering of leaden shillings and bad half-crowns, and an occasional raid on a hen-roost.

Where the vagrant now was, the superintendent of the Treport police confessed to be a riddle beyond his solving. From information he had received, he said—employing the formula dear to the uniformed

protectors of our social order—she had not left the town by the London road, or the Land's End road, or the road leading to Carstow Churchtown. Constables on their beats had been able to tell their superior that much. On the other hand, there were lanes, such as Holloway itself, by which the wanderer could easily have quitted Treport unseen and unchallenged. A person "known to the police," and whom uncharitable neighbours eved askance, and described as a common informer, whom the superintendent had consulted, and from whom he had learned that Ghost Nan was of late a guest at Mr. Treloar's ill-savoured hostelry, had added the further tidings: "She's flitted, though;" and the superintendent had scarcely expected to find the

bird of prey he sought still in its temporary nest at Giles Treloar's.

It was getting to be twilight when Hugh parted from his new acquaintance at the corner of the quay, and went on board his vessel, lying at her moorings. There was routine work to be done there, dull but necessary—the inspection of ropes and sails, of cables and coal-bunkers, the stowing away of stores, and a consultation with Long Michael as to the morrow's labours. Hugh had not come down to Treport to eat the bread of idleness, and he was anxious to be afloat and busy.

"Quite right, Cap.," said the mate, cheerfully. "We're not likely to sit with our hands folded, not we, now there's a spell of calm, and lots of big ships waiting for a

breeze until they're tired of it, and so signal for a tug. And, when weather comes later, we'll have the salvage to keep us alive," added the honest fellow, himself as softhearted as a woman, but who had learned from childhood to regard wrecks as a legitimate source of profit to those who toiled to save life gratis, and property for a reward. But all this time Hugh had an uneasy feeling that he had let slip an opportunity which might never recur, of effecting the object to which, beside his father's grave at Bala, he had vowed to devote the best energies of his life.

## CHAPTER XIV.

#### ON BOARD THE "WESTERN MAID."

HUGH had not much time to waste in vain repinings. The Western Tug and Salvage Company did not intend their steamer stationed at Treport to be an ornamental fixture of what the natives designated the quay-pool, and non-Cornishmen knew as the harbour; and so the young captain of the Western Maid had plenty of occupation. There were, as Long Michael the mate had predicted, skippers command-

ing heavily laden merchantmen lying near the entrance of the Channel, who grew tired of whistling for a wind that never came, and contracted with some steamer to help them on their way towards Southampton Water or the Nore. Towing a big ship bound for the port of London may not at first sight appear to be very exciting work; but Hugh Ashton cheerfully accepted his new duties, and discharged them in a manner that satisfied his employers, and won the respect of his crew. Long Michael, whose unselfish soul rejoiced in the growing popularity of the young man who had been put over his head, rubbed his rough hands together and chuckled over his pupil's rapid progress.

"Picks up sea-learning, the Captain does, quicker than most," the honest mate would on BOARD THE "WESTERN MAID." 227 say. "Not that he wanted making into a sailor; that was done ready to hand. But then, the coast, it does want a sharp eye and a good memory to make sure of the landmarks, 'special in dark weather. And Captain Ashton's getting to know them as well as a shepherd knows his sheep."

Estimable Michael had no idea of the hard and assiduous study of the chart in wakeful hours of the night, which enabled his young commander to compare real crags and promontories, with their painted presentment on the map, and to know one beacon from another, and one shoal from its fellow, along the difficult Channel coast. To the mate, who could read and write certainly—most Cornishmen can do that—but to whom book-lore was a Pilgrim's Progress of the most painful character, and

whose eyes were familiar with no volumes but those which sea and sky present to the inquirer, Hugh's prompt proficiency appeared little less than marvellous. He, Michael, was a smart seaman, but had he not been "at it" all his life, as 'prentice, ordinary, and A.B., until, in the fulness of time, he ripened into an officer? He had learned his trade thoroughly, but slowly, as those who learn by rule of thumb must ever acquire an art, and even now he was, though the best of mates, not fit to be a captain. Hugh was a smart seaman too: but he was something more, and being a gallant young fellow, with a gentle temper and a lion's heart, had won the highest esteem that Long Michael had to bestow.

The Western Maid did good work, puffing

and panting up the coast with a deep-laden three-master, like some gigantic fish fast hooked, lumbering heavily along at the other end of the tough tow-rope, and with just sail enough spread to get steerage-way upon her, and avoid fouling in the crowded waters east of Portland Bill. Then would spring up a puff of air, a "fine top-sail breeze," as the officers of the towed vessel would call it; and then the skipper, with the terrors of grumbling owners before his eyes, would discharge his steam-mentor, set every rag of canvas that would draw, and a little more, and run or beat unaided Londonwards, until the treacherous breeze died away, and there was swearing, and signalling for another tug out of some friendly harbour.

"Glad to have us, and glad to get rid

of us!" Long Michael would say, with a grin—"just as if, Cap., we were the doctor."

The crew of the steamer criticised Hugh Ashton, much as a company of foot-soldiers or troop of cavalry criticise in barrack-rooms the new captain who has arrived to lead them. And the questions they asked of one another were much the same, allowance being made for sea and shipwreck being the foes to fear, instead of human enemies, that soldiers would have propounded.

Our new chief, of what stuff is he? Will he fight, or is the white feather to be looked for? Does he worry a poor fellow's life out, or is he reasonable with those that do their best? Has he his

weather-eye open, or is he a simpleton, and easy to deceive?

The verdict as regarded Hugh was favourable. There are men whose daring no one doubts, whose very eye speaks of courage waiting for its opportunity, and Then he was Hugh was one of them. pleasant of speech and manner, but keen to note a dereliction of duty. Shirkers, and there were two or three on board the Western Maid who did the least they could for their wages, as warranted by the strictest principles of political economy, felt as though they would rather not shirk, with Hugh's eye upon them. He was no nagging martinet, but the men knew somehow that he had a rough as well as a smooth side to his tongue in the hour of need. And they liked him the better because they feared to offend him.

Of course Hugh was exceptionally lucky in his mate. It would have cost a malicious subordinate nothing to have put his unpractised superior constantly in the wrong, to have insured a growling crew, dissatisfied owners, and diminished profits to the Tug and Salvage Company. Even the frequent coaling would have been a stumbling-block in the path of an unaided tyro in Hugh's position. He had the printed instructions to guide him, but instructions of that sort are seldom very useful to a neophyte unless he has the advantage of somebody practical enough to read between the lines, and to know what is really meant. Lightermen who bring off supplies of fuel to a tug are not always scrupulous as to weight and price; nor are deck-hands invariably unwilling to abstain, in harbour, from slipping a sackful of black diamonds into some leaky punt or grimy wherry alongside.

Hugh did his work well, and earned the half-year's dividend for his masters, the shareholders of the Western Tug and Salvage Company, better than old Captain Cleat in his best days had ever done. He conciliated, by judicious firmness, ready banter, and serene good-humour, some of the sourest and most quarrelsome of skippers. He got cash payments, or certificates of indebtedness that were almost as valuable, where some of his temporary clients would fain have ignored their liability on casting off the tow-rope and hoisting sail.

"A good fair-weather cap'en, I don't

deny it," said, in private forecastle conclave, the worst man and the greatest talker on board the Western Maid, Salem Jackson by name. "Nor yet I don't deny, chaps, that he's got a pleasant way of speaking up. I never liked the appointment, mind ye, shipmates. He's a lady's pet, he is; and what has an old dame, though she be Madam Moneybags, to do meddling with who's to command a craft like ours? Let's see what sort he turns out when we get the gales."

But in spite of Salem Jackson, and the smouldering embers of discontent that he sedulously strove to fan into flame, Hugh went prosperously on in his new career. He won golden opinions, and, for that matter, gold in a more substantial shape, by discovering the famous derelict, the aban-

on board the "western maid." 235 doned wine-ship from Lisbon, which was beginning to grow half mythical, so many were the tales told of fishers and coasters that had sighted her at early dawn or dewy eve, hull down, in the dim distance, and of chases which fog or night, or the set of adverse currents, had rendered fruitless. As it was, Hugh listened much and said little, comparing the evidence, until he had made up his own mind as to the set of tide and sea-way, and, cruising off into the southwestern waters, came in sight of the deserted vessel.

"Portuguese rigged! Nobody at the helm—a barque—and water-logged," said Hugh, as he descended the rigging, his telescope under his arm, after taking a steady look at the derelict. "I suspect the people aboard her were seized with a panic

when she sprung a leak, took to their boats without a compass, and were lost. But she's safe enough; and it will go hard but we get her over Treport bar. Keep her away, Jackson, will you—two points yet, d'ye hear. And now, Michael, we must drive her along."

The fog-bank was nearly, but not quite, like some supernatural cloud in the Homeric epic, around the abandoned barque, when the steamer neared her sufficiently to enable grappling-irons to be flung into her standing gear. She had her jib and foresail yet set; but there was no hand upon the useless wheel, and the heavy craft drifted helpless, at the mercy of wind and sea. When boarded, not a living creature, as might have been expected, was found above hatches or below. Even the lories and

on Board the "western mail." 237 parrots, chained to perches in the captain's cabin, had died for lack of food and water. The ship, however, was yet sound, and the valuable cargo unhurt.

"Too much, to my mind, the skipper's share, according to present rules," said one of the shareholders in the Tug and Salvage Company to another, below his breath, after the Board meeting. "Two hundred and eighty pounds for that young Ashton, out of the port-wine ship. It's just a picking of all our pockets."

"Ah, but my lady likes him!" returned, with a grudging sigh, the congenial spirit to whom he spoke. "The whole question of share and salary ought to be looked to. But Lady Absolute wouldn't stand it; and she owns nine-tenths of the stock after all."

In the meantime, and pending the desirable revision of share and salary, Hugh was half a hero in the eyes of the Treport maritime population. Nothing succeeds like success, and although there had gone no danger and little toil to the winning of the wine-ship, whose owners or under-writers would be thankful to commute the total loss of vessel and cargo for a heavy award of salvage, still, in the popular imagination, Hugh Ashton had performed an exploit worthy of all praise. The only person who, in all seriousness, lifted up a dissentient voice, was one who liked Hugh well-old Captain Trawl, his host.

"Too easy! too easy by half, my lad!" he would say, with an old mariner's halfheathen tinge of superstition. "Can't be on BOARD THE "WESTERN MAID." 239 all fair wind and smooth sea, ye know. The worst squalls are those that come sudden, after a calm."

#### CHAPTER XV.

#### TO THE RESCUE.

# "TERRIBLE night, neighbour!" "Terrible night it be!"

The speakers were a white-coated shepherd, whose dogs and he had enough to do to hurry the belated flock along the moorland road; and a carter trudging homewards beside his fore horse, whose tangled mane tossed wildly in the gale. Then both men stood still for a moment, not to converse, but, as it seemed, to let their eyes by a common impulse turn to the leaden-coloured expanse of sea, streaked with angry whiteness, that was yet dimly discernible beneath the driving rack of storm-clouds; and, as they did so, the shepherd said, as earnestly as ever he had spoken when joining in the responses in church:

"The Lord be merciful to all poor creatures at sea!"

Shepherd and carter were right. A terrible night it was, the wind rising, the rain and hail rushing down in arrowy showers, and then ceasing, as if the might of the gale were too much even for them, and the far-off roll of thunder audible amidst the nearer, hoarser roar of the great sea, now fully aroused and clamorous as some monster eager for its prey. The wild

white birds that glean their living from the sea had scented danger hours ago, and flown, screaming, far inland for shelter. The storm-drum was hoisted at every station where the Admiralty had control; and the telegraphic wire had long since begun to flash warnings to harbour-master and dock-superintendent throughout the coast-line, that mischief was to be looked for, and vessels were best in safe anchorage and land-locked places on such a night as threatened to pass over our shores.

But if the gathering night, and the blackening sky, and the howl of the gale, seemed dreadful enough to those dwellers on dry land, who ran no risk save of an unroofed cow-shed or cottage-thatch blown away, doubly formidable did they appear to those who, living in Treport, heard the

spray rattle against their windows, and shuddered even at their firesides as they listened to the shriek of the wind as it gained strength. What waves were those that beat upon the beach, seeming to shake the very earth with the weight and fury of their assault! Even in the sheltered quay-pool the water was rough, boats bobbing up and down cork-like, and larger craft straining at chain and hawser, like high-mettled horses fretting against the curb. It was one of those rare nights on which, in exposed towns on the sea-coast, there is but scanty sleep for anyone, so vivid and so immediate is the sympathy between those safe ashore and those in sore peril at sea.

"Where's the Captain of the steamer? Oh, here he is!" said the officer in charge

of the coastguard station, elbowing his way through the throng of loungers at the street end. "Well, Captain Ashton, there's work for you and your tug; that is, if you can venture to tow out the life-boat in such weather, and if the men will man her. There's a big, full-rigged vessel, homewardbound, in distress near the Head. The officer at the coastguard station there has sent the news by a mounted messenger. Something wrong on board of her; for they've only fired one gun, and twice burned a Bengal light, and yet she seems quite unmanageable. They expect her to strike on the Spur Reef."

Hugh Ashton was ready enough, and so was the steamer. The Western Maid had been lying all day, with fires burning and crew on board, in expectation of some such

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There was a stir on the quay, and in especial a bustle about the boat-house where the life-boat was kept. She was dragged out and launched; there were plenty of muscular arms ready to help in that; and the men who were to row her mustered, in their cork jackets, to answer to their names, as willingly as ever they had gathered for pilchard-fishing. They were not to go on board her, though, until it was certain that their thus risking valuable lives would be of use, so they, too, passed over the steamer's gangway.

There was some weeping, and some shrill remonstrance among women who had mingled with the crowd. We cannot all be heroes, and especially heroines, and perhaps the most painful part is that assigned to those who stay at home, in an agony of suspense, while the dear ones are away doing battle against storm or enemy. It certainly was as naughty a night to swim in as ever English shores have known, from the time when Shakspeare wrote till now; and the very thunder of the surf, as the Atlantic tide rose in angry majesty, had in its diapason something of menace. The spray broke high, in glistening columns or heavy sheets, over the pierhead.

"Ready, now? No hurry, lads! Standby, to cast off moorings," called out Hugh Ashton from his deck.

"Fair-weather Captain, is he now?" whispered Big Ned, the Devonshire man, in the ear of Salem Jackson, as he pointed

to where Hugh stood, with bright, watchful eyes and calm, resolute face.

Salem Jackson, who looked paler than usual, and seemed but ill at ease, in spite of the glass of rum so lately swallowed at the "Mariner's Joy," responded by an inarticulate snarl. Just before the moorings were cast off, 'Nezer the dwarf, followed by Neptune, came bustling over the gangway.

"Take the dog!" exclaimed the dwarf, eagerly; "take him, Cap! You don't know—how should ye?—what Nep's worth in a sea. I'd go with ye, but that I'm not straight-backed. But Nep's as good as a gold guinea."

And Hugh, smiling good-naturedly, allowed the four-footed volunteer, who had

taken an unusual fancy to himself personally, to accompany the expedition.

"Now for it!" There was a rush to the pier-head, in spite of the spray, to see the steamer fight her way over the bar, where the waves leaped and roared like It was no child's play that struggle with the surf; but there were two pair of stout hands at the wheel, and the engines worked their best, so that, although for a moment the Western Maid, reeling, and deluged fore and aft, was all but hidden by wave-crests and broken water, she burst the barrier, and fought her way, slowly and sturdily, out to sea. A hearty hurrah from the lookers-on greeted this first victory in the elemental strife; and it was felt that, come what might, Hugh Ashton had fairly won his spurs, and earned his reputation as a bold and skilful seaman. Whether he could bring efficient aid to those in distress, was quite another affair.

This was no holiday voyage. The quick jerking motion of the engines, and the quivering of the timbers under repeated buffets from the heavy sea, told that the gallant little tug was doing all that wood and iron and steam could do in that lifeand-death encounter with Nature in her wrath.

Drenched with the driving spray and pelting rain, the men bent over the bulwarks and shaded their eyes to see the farther through the scud and the dark night; while by Hugh's skill and forethought alone was the life-boat astern kept from being dashed to splinters against the steamer's counter. A third sailor was soon

wanted at the helm, so great was the force of wind and sea.

Before the Western Maid had well gained an offing, there arose a murmur among some of the crew, of which Long Michael, the mate, shrewdly suspected Salem Jackson to be the originator:

"Put back! put back! It can't be done!"

"Who is it that says it can't be done?" called out Hugh, in clear, ringing tones of command. "I say it can, and it shall! Silence there—and steady, lads! Helm hard aport, and set the storm-jib forward, will you! She rides easier now."

There was no more talk of putting back. Indeed, to retreat was almost as dangerous as to advance; and the steamer, once clear of the tremendous surf that beat upon the coast, as if maddened by opposition to its might, really did bound more lightly over the huge black waves that rose in endless succession as though to overwhelm her.

"There she be, Cap. Heaven have mercy on those on board her!" exclaimed Michael, the mate, as, holding by shroud and bulwark—for to keep one's footing on that soaked and heeling deck was, even for a sailor, difficult—he crept up to Hugh's side. "Go to pieces she must, in ten minutes' time or so."

And indeed it appeared as if the honest Cornishman's prediction would soon be realized. There was the doomed ship, with broken masts and disordered rigging, careening over beneath the force of the merciless billows that broke in thunder over her huge hull. She fired no guns, and made none of the signals usual to a vessel in such dire distress, but floundered helplessly on, like a wounded whale in some shallow of the Greenland coast, to where destruction awaited her.

Full ahead, the foam, and froth, and hissing jets of spray betraying its presence, was the Spur Reef. The low rocks, black and cruel, like the jagged teeth of some half-sunken monster of the deep, could just be made out through the gloom of the wild night. The ship's torn sails were flapping like the wings of a hurt sea-bird, and she rolled and staggered as she ploughed her fated way towards the rocks. Then, with a crash, she struck upon the reef, and instantly the waters leaped over her, so that she was hidden for the time in foam and

scud; but, when again a glimpse of her was obtained, a blue light was observed to beburning on board her.

"Not many on her deck!" said half a dozen voices at once on board the Western-Maid.

But there was not much time for talking, since the life-boat must be used now or never; and to get her manned and started without fatal accident in such a sea, and with the steamer pitching and rolling as she did, like a maddened thing, required the nicest seamanship and the best exertions of all who shared in the work. There was no flinching, though, and one by one the trained oarsmen dropped into their places.

"Together, and with a will!" shouted the coxswain, grasping the tiller-ropes; and

off went the life-boat on her short but difficult trip.

It was a fearful sight to see that boat tossing on the feathery crest of a giant wave, like a withered leaf driven by the wintry wind, and then to watch her sink, as into a black ravine, into the deep trough of the raving, raging sea. Again and again she faced the surges, and again and again, beaten and baffled, she was swung round and driven back. Then two of the oars snapped suddenly; the life-boat broached to, capsized, flinging the rowers out into the angry water, and floated helpless.

There was a loud outcry among those on board the tug, echoed from the wrecked ship; but luckily the steamer was near, the life-boat men had their cork jackets to keep them afloat, and there were lines enough in readiness on board the Western Maid, so that, thanks to noosed ropes and deft hands, the crew of the boat were rapidly dragged on board, and the buoyant little craft itself secured.

"Those poor souls yonder," said the old coxswain of the life-boat, as he pointed to the despairing group visible above the black bulwarks of the stranded ship, "we'm helpless to help them, Cap'en. You may!"

"Steam can do it," was Hugh's cheerful response. "Go on ahead there!" And, fighting through the wrath of the tempest, the Western Maid approached the wreck.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE PURPLE BAG.

HUGH ASHTON, when he undertook to bring the Western Maid nearer to the wrecked ship, knew perfectly well that he was entering upon a task of no common difficulty and danger. In front was the Spur Reef, on which the waves burst with a fury that almost illumined the air with the whiteness of the glancing, ghostly spray. Beyond lay an iron-bound coast, on which tall ships unnumbered have laid their bones,

while astern shrieked the wind and boomed the sea. The steamer was in no safe position where she lay. The smashing of a paddle-wheel, the snapping of a rudderchain, any blunder on the part of the helmsman, might be fatal. But to ground on the Spur Reef was death. No wonder, at such a moment, that there were signs of dissent among the crew.

"Back her! Run for port! As well order our coffins as go on!" Such were the ominous murmurs that reached Hugh's ears.

"It's that blackguard Jackson, always growling," said Long Michael, aside, to his young commander. "I've a belaying-pin here, and I——"

"Stop!" rejoined Hugh, laying his hand on the mate's arm. "Trust me, in case of VOL. I.

need, to enforce obedience. Better, though, to avoid bad blood. I'll say a word to the crew."

He did say a word, and the word was well said. He told them that, as men and sailors, as Christians and Cornishmen, he felt sure of their courage, and sure of their good-will. Perishing fellow-creatures were close at hand. Let them obey orders, and, live or die, they would have done their duty. Every minute was worth a fortune.

The sailors set up a cheer. The crew of a tug are not under man-of-war discipline, and even Navy Jack does not always now exhibit the blind obedience of his predecessors in the old war-time. But seamen who cannot be led by such a leader as was Hugh Ashton must be a sorry ship's company. With two or three exceptions, the sailors of the Western Maid were with their young captain heart and soul.

The most notable exception was that of Salem Jackson, a lathy, loosely-hung fellow, who was born in Cornwall certainly, but who had spent his best years in America and on board American ships, and whose nature did not seem to have been improved by travel. He had come home a scoffer, who jeered at the simple chapel-going folks that had never left Treport, and he was what was once known as a "sea-lawyer," a man given to argue and speechify—a character hateful anywhere, but doubly detestable on board ship.

"Don't heed him, mates!" bawled Salem

Jackson, starting forward; "he doesn't know the danger, a fresh-water sailor like he, so we'll——"

Down went the mutineer, felled like an ox, and lay panting in the scuppers, the blood trickling down his pale face. There had been no need for Long Michael's belaying-pin. Hugh's strong right hand was competent to read a lesson to the contemners of authority, without extraneous aid.

"Serve him right, the chicken-hearted lubber!" exclaimed the mate; and "Serve him right!" was the general verdict of the crew.

Even Salem Jackson, when he rose, finding himself in a hopeless minority of one, begged pardon sulkily, and stood waiting for orders. Then Hugh Ashton, having got l

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his men in hand, got his vessel in hand too, and with a brisk look-out, and the engines hard at work, pushed on.

The approach to the stranded ship was in itself a daring deed, but not a precaution was neglected that could make the difference between rashness and steady valour. The lead-line was kept continually going, that shoal water might not be suddenly reached. There were three men at the helm. The call-boy at the hatchway of the engine-room never slackened his attention for an instant. Captain and mate might have been endowed with the gift of ubiquity, so unsparing was the vigilance of both.

"She's breaking up—parting amidships! For God's sake, help!" came the cry from on board the wrecked vessel. "We'm help you, never fear!" rang forth the answer from the approaching steamer.

There was an ominous creaking and crashing of timbers, and then a rift appeared in the huge black hull, and the waves came leaping and tumbling through the chasm. Very ghastly looked the few faces that peered above the bulwarks of the wreck, in the last gleam of the blue light. But just then a rocket-line flew from the side of the Western Maid, and then another; and a feeble cheer from on board the wreck told that the lines had been hauled in and the ropes made fast. The steamer, with safety, could approach no nearer. It was but a perilous bridge that the ropes made, and one across which no woman, and but few strong men untrained

to the sea, could have passed amidst the jerk and wash of those tumbling, tossing waves.

"Make haste! be quick!" cried the rescuers, as the ship began to part, beam from beam, and fragments of wreck, and bales, and casks mottled the sea foam.

One, two, three, four, five of the small company on board the wrecked vessel, one by one gained the steamer's deck. Of even these, three lost their hold of the rope, and were saved, two by volunteers, who with lines round their waist ventured on the plunge, and one by 'Nezer's dog Neptune, who dashed into the waves as if the adventure were mere sport, and clutched the collar of a drowning man in his strong teeth, holding on till dog and man were lassoed and hauled in. Three others

slipped from the rope and perished close to the shattered ship. Then came the ninth, who hesitated long, until the very planks he trod seemed giving way beneath his feet, and then committed himself, reluctantly, to the swaying rope.

"A landsman—a passenger, no doubt, by the awkward ways of him. Why, the chap has something in his hand that hinders him!" said a sailor.

"Hold the rope with both hands!" shouted Long Michael; "keep your grip, I say."

But before the sentence was finished, the unfortunate man, washed from his hold by an enormous wave, was seen struggling with the leaping waters. The distance from the steamer was such that the boldest swimmers hesitated to make the plunge. Hugh re-

leased his grasp on Neptune's collar, and, with a short excited bark, the brave dog dashed over the gangway. A blue light was now burning at the steamer's bow. Its glare lit up the surface of the sea, and by its light the Newfoundland could be seen, swimming gallantly amidst the foam, and holding on tenaciously to some object submerged beneath the waves. Twice, thrice, a light rope, with a running noose, was thrown, but it fell short.

"Put the line round me," shouted Hugh, passing the noose beneath his arms; "and you, lads, be spry to haul in!" And he sprang into the sea, but such was the force and fury of the boiling surf that he was breathless and faint when he, in company with the dog and the object, whatever it was, which the dog had seized between

his teeth, was dragged on board his vessel. Curiosity was excited as to this latter.

"It's a dead child!" said one. bundle!" said another. "It's nabbut a bag that you poor chap lost his life for, and no gold in't nouther, to judge by the heft!" remarked, in tones of disappointment, a. third bystander. Of those rescued, three were ordinary seamen, foreigners, to judge by their swarthy complexions and the rings in their ears; the fourth was a negro, presumably a ship's cook, who rolled his opal eyes as if in speechless terror; but the fifth was a bright-faced boy of fourteen, whose gold-laced cap and the gilt anchor buttons on his once smart jacket denoted that he was of a higher grade than his companions in misfortune.

"An officer, young gentleman? You can tell me, then, if there is anyone left on board."

"Not a living soul!" answered the lad, briskly. "We hadn't, by good luck, many passengers, if any luck could be in such a voyage as ours. My name's Gray—Frank. Gray—and I'm a midshipman on board the Waterwitch there, one of Grogram's Queensland liners. There's her cargo," added the boy, pointing to the bales that went floating past. "You'll have the beach white with as good cotton as ever was shipped from Australia. Ten minutes later, and I couldn't have been here to tell you about it."

The Western Maid had done her work now, so far as the preserving of life went; and, as for the salvage of cargo, that, in so wild a sea, and on the verge of the Spur Reef,

was impracticable. There was nothing for it but to put the steamer about, and return to Treport. Fortunately the violence of the gale had somewhat abated, and Long Michael was confident of making the harbour in safety.

The young midshipman of the wrecked vessel, when Hugh was able to quit the deck, told over a glass of steaming spirits and water, in the captain's little cabin, how the calamity occurred.

"You see," he said, "the ship was a fine one, nearly new, and well-found; but we had bad luck from the first. We hadn't been three days out before sickness broke out—a bad fever it was—among the steerage passengers. Captain, and first and third officers, with several of the passengers and crew, died of that. Then the second officer,

who took charge of her, was drowned, with the boatswain and two more, when our foremast and maintopmast were blown out of her, west of the Scilly Isles. We'd got out of our course, I must tell you, and metweather; and, one disaster following on another, the most of the crew broke into the spirit-room, got mad drunk, and took to such boats as hadn't been washed away. I saw the cutter founder before it was a cable's length away, and I suspect the jollyboat never got ashore either. We were nine, all told, when you came to our aid, Captain Ashton; and my mother will thank you, I know, for my sake, if ever you come New Forest way."

Hugh's next care was to examine the bag

—Neptune's prize. It was of moroccoleather, and of a dull purple colour that

was very little changed by its immersion in salt water. The handles were of tough black leather, and to one of them was still attached a red silk handkerchief, carefully knotted. The young midshipman of the Queensland liner could tell very little as to the luckless cabin-passenger who had been possessed of it, and whose life might possibly have been saved but for his solicitude concerning it. "He was a quiet, silent sort of customer—not a bad sort of fellow—and his name was Perkins, or Purkiss. pose he was somebody's clerk, but he kept what took him to Australia and back again very much to himself."

Treport harbour was safely reached at last; the steamer snug at her moorings, the crew dismissed to their abodes, and the rescued mariners made as comfortable as circumstances would permit at the Seamen's Home; while Hugh, accompanied by Neptune, young Frank Gray walking at his side, and the purple bag in his hand, made his way through the darkling streets homewards.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## IN GUILDHALL CHAMBERS.

"THE very finest fellow, that Hugh Ashton—Captain Ashton, you know, mother—that I have met since I've been knocking about the world," said young Frank Gray, a midshipman in Messrs Grogram's merchant service, and late junior officer of the ill-fated Waterwitch, from Queensland homeward-bound, with cotton never destined to supply British spindles and jennies with the raw material of our

national manufacture. "It's not only that his pluck and seamanship saved my life; but didn't he take me home to his own lodgings, rig me out afresh, lend me money to bring me here, and treat me, in short, as if I'd been his own brother? I'd like to see the fellow who'd dare to breathe a word against him!" added the boy, with flushed cheeks and tearful eyes he was ashamed of, and all a boy's enthusiasm, when once at home again in his mother's pretty cottage, near the Dorsetshire end of the New Forest.

And Mrs. Gray laughed, and wept, we may be sure, at these words from her sailor boy, whose age was fourteen, and his knocking about the world a process that had occupied twenty-one months or so; and, while returning him the ten pounds that he

had expended on her rescued son, she wrote Hugh a grateful letter, telling him that under one roof in Dorsetshire he would ever find friends.

In the meantime, the purple bag which the joint efforts of Hugh and Neptune had saved from the wreck, cost the former more trouble than he had at first anticipated. There being no outward indication as to the address of its owner, his heirs, administrators, or assigns—to borrow a legal formula from the frequent study of which few of us can have been absolutely free—Hugh was compelled to force the lock, which was of a curious construction, and not easily broken open. The bag proved to contain nothing but a packet, which might be conjectured to consist of valuable documents, most carefully wrapped in oiled silk for the

exclusion of water. This outer covering being removed, a stout paper envelope next appeared, sealed with five seals bearing the initials J. P., and addressed in a clerkly hand: "Arthur Wadmore Dicker, Esq., 11, Guildhall Chambers, Poultry, London, E.C.;" while underneath was written: "In case of accident, the finder is earnestly requested to forward this, as above." There seemed to Hugh to be something almost touching in these words, traced as they were by the hand of one who had perished, before his very eyes, in the strict execution of what he regarded as a sacred trust.

A letter, penned by Hugh to Arthur Wadmore Dicker, Esquire, had produced a speedy reply, signed, "Yours cordially, in haste, A. W. Dicker," and dated from Guildhall Chambers, London, E.C. In

this communication Mr. Dicker expressed himself as under no trifling weight of obligation to Captain Ashton for the recovery and safe care of certain important papers which, there could be little doubt, must have been on board the unlucky ship Would Captain Ashton add Waterwitch. to that obligation by himself kindly undertaking to convey the papers to London, and to place them in Mr. Dicker's own hands? Between the hours of 11 a.m. and 12.30, Mr. Dicker would be glad personally to receive Captain Ashton, on a particular day specified, could Captain Ashton make it convenient to call. And, as a matter of course, the expenses of Captain Ashton's journey would be defrayed. A hasty postscript requested that Hugh would telegraph in reply.

"Time is money, really money, as I have heard, with some of these City men," said Hugh, smiling, to himself, as he finished the perusal of Mr. Dicker's letter; "and I make no doubt that my unknown correspondent is one of them." However, he had himself just then, thanks to the necessity for some repairs to crank and boilers in the engine-room of the Western Maid, ample leisure, so he duly telegraphed his reply as requested, and at the appointed time found his way to No. 11, Guildhall Chambers.

It is impossible anywhere, but in London most of all, to judge of the calibre of a man's business by the aspect of the locality in which it is transacted. There are City magnates whose names are mentioned with honour on the Exchange of every continental

town from Amsterdam to Vienna, who. nevertheless. conduct their world-wide dealings in mean little dens and amidst surroundings. poverty-stricken So there gorgeous establishments, all plateglass, French polish, gilding, and mahogany, quite as fine, and about as respectable, as a gin-palace. It is not up the wide, marble staircase, flanked by double gilt lamps upborne by colossal Caryatides, of the Megalotherion Credit Company, that wealthy financiers, the kings of the money-market, habitually pass with creaking tread. Those princely stairs, that majestic entrance, those rich liveries, and the solemn hush that prevails within the stately premises of the brand-new Company, are all, in the eyes of prudent men, substantial advertisements to be paid for, soon or late, with the cash of the confiding shareholders, of whose bones the astute directors intend (figuratively) to make their bread.

Mr. Dicker's place of business was neither squalid, as are those of some commercial grandees of the old school, nor was it meretricious in its splendour. Ample and commodious it certainly was, and it had an air suggestive of solid wealth, orderly arrangements, and great affairs conducted with as much promptitude and as little hurry as the feverish spirit of modern trade allows. There were many applicants for an interview waiting in the different anterooms, not a few of whom eyed Hugh Ashton with a sort of resentful envy as, having sent in his name, he was, after only a quarter of an hour's delay, ushered into the great man's presence.

The great man gave Hugh Ashton his hand to shake; or, more acurately, he gave him part of it, say two fingers and the tip of the thumb. In any case it was intended as a compliment, and one which Mr. Dicker seldom paid to men of Hugh's financial mark. In Mr. Dicker's table of precedence, Hugh Ashton, and such as Hugh, were set down at zero. They were to be spoken to, if needed, per proxy of a clerk, or perhaps by a chief-clerk. But as for shaking hands with the captains of tugsteamers, that was absurd. Mr. Dicker's manual accolades were for the tritons of the money-market, for "warm men" on 'Change, and for what he was fond of designating as "sprigs of nobility," whom he entertained with royal hospitality at his Hyde Park mansion, or his Twickenham villa. But Hugh had rendered an unusual service, and therefore received a welcome at 11, Guildhall Chambers, which, had he known the ways of the place better, ought to have astonished him.

"Upon my word, Mr.—to be sure, Captain Ashton, I am very much obliged to you, deeply, in fact, your debtor," said the merchant-prince, blandly, leaning back in his beehive-chair, and looking first at Hugh, and then at the cheque-book that lay open beside him, on a table heaped with letters and deeds, and papers miscellaneous. "Your gallant conduct— Will you allow me?" And as he spoke he took the bag which Hugh offered him, drew forth the packet of papers, and satisfied himself that the seals were intact. "Upon my word, Mr.—yes, Captain Acres—Eyre —Ashton, I am monstrously obliged to you," said the great man.

It was one of Mr. Dicker's little acquired affectations not to be able to treasure in his retentive memory the names of the humbly born. He had learned the trick late in life, not from the young fellows of quality who sat at his dinners, and flirted at his garden-parties, but from certain middle-aged Lady Maries and Lady Floras, who frequented Mrs. Dicker's costly entertainments, and who made it a point to mangle any name not registered by Debrett.

"Monstrously obliged to you, indeed," repeated Mr. Dicker. George the Magnificent, and Colonel Hanger, and Long Pole Wellesley, associates of the First Gentleman in Europe, used to say "monstrous-

ly" in days when Mr. Dicker was a boy just placed in a Cheapside warehouse, at a weekly salary of three half-crowns; and he clung to the old phrase, which had filtered down through various strata of society before it reached the Industrious Apprentice, now elderly and almost old, but at the zenith of prosperity. Hugh said, simply, that he had done no more than his duty.

Something in his voice or in his mien made Mr. Dicker look at him more closely than he had done before.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the selfmade man; "why, you are a gentleman, Captain Ashton! I had no idea——"

An expression, half of humour, half of pain, flitted across Hugh's handsome face as he heard these words, almost identical with those which old Captain Trawl had used on first seeing him at his own door in Treport.

"No gentleman, sir!" he said, quietly.

"A colonist and a sailor I have been; and a little while ago I was a poor fisherman, and owner of hired pleasure-boats, beside a Welsh lake. It was a great promotion for me when, quite recently, I was set to command a steam-tug."

Mr. Dicker, who piqued himself on his infallibility, looked a little annoyed; but the cloud cleared quickly from his furrowed brow, as he said,

"Well, Captain, we may at least understand one another; the rather," with a glance at the clock, ticking inexorably opposite, "that I have numerous appointments, and that my time is not my own. I was very

much vexed and grieved, quite upset, I assure you, when I heard of the loss of the Waterwitch. Grogram and Company always insure, of course, so there's not a penny of loss; but then the lives! Poor Purkiss! I have lost the most faithful servant, sir, and one who was in my employment for eight and twenty years-eight -and twenty. Poor Purkiss-not married -no; but two dependent sisters-for whom, as I have already notified, provision will be made. Well, well! It does not do for men of business to indulge in sentiment; but I am sorry, Captain Ashton, that my excellent clerk should have died as you describe, a victim to his duty. You believe me. I am sure!"

There was a little unaccustomed hoarseness in Mr. Dicker's pompous voice, a little

unwonted moisture about Mr. Dicker's cold eyes, and Hugh did believe in the reality of the merchant's sorrow for his faithful clerk.

"Ah! well," pursued Mr. Dicker, rattling his massive watch-chain, "time-and tide" -here a second glance at the office clock -"wait for no man. Captain, the papers you have saved at no light risk, and so honourably restored to me, are of great value, ve-ry great value. That poor Purkiss did so well for me, out in Queensland If he had but come home by mail there! steamer, instead of that unlucky sailing-ship; but it's too late now. How can I acknowledge the obligation?" he added, looking very hard at his cheque-book, and then very hard at Hugh. He saw no answering smirk, no coy delight, such as rich men

sometimes behold in the countenances of poor ones, when they are about to write an order on the banker.

"You tell me you are not a gentleman, but I'll be hanged if I like to offer you money," blurted out the merchant-prince.

"I had rather not, thank you, sir, accept anything beyond the price of my return ticket," answered Hugh. "Money honestly earned, I have no false shame in taking, but——"

Just then a bell rang and a head was popped in.

"Sir Peter is come, please, sir, and Mr. Joseph Bullion, by appointment."

"I must say good-bye," exclaimed the great man, giving Hugh his whole hand this time to shake. "But—but you're a fine lad, and I like you; and if ever you

want a friend in need—I'm a railway director, and what not; this is no idle compliment, mind—you come here, and ask for Arthur Wadmore Dicker!"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## MAN PROPOSES.

SIR LUCIUS LARPENT had made up what he took to be his mind. It might well be believed that, for purely rational purposes, such persons as Sir Lucius have no minds at all. They do not reason. To them the faculty of concrete thinking appears to be as much denied as the power of flying. But, in a halting and irregular fashion, they do think a little, and feel a good deal, and the insolvent baronet had

weighed the pros and cons, so far as his limited scope of mental vision could take them in, and he had made up his mind that he would marry Maud. Yes; he would marry her, and at once, or at least as soon as milliners and lawyers would allow, and there would be an end of it.

Personally, Sir Lucius very much preferred his "bachelor freedom." Plenty of money, a few years more of London, of Norway yachting, or grouse-shooting, trips to Paris, and scampers to Italy, with the run of certain celebrated country houses within the confines of Britain, constituted an earthly elysium that he was loth to lose.

But then, as he argued with himself, beggars, even with a handle to their names, cannot be choosers. Married life was slow, of course; but then, in this case, the chains would be plated with gold. Old Lord Penrith might be expected to do something very handsome for the favourite niece whom all believed to be the destined heiress of his large estates. And then, the Dowager! Could it be possible that he, Lucius Larpent, should, by the simple process of placing a golden circlet on a slender girlish finger, become an eldest son in property as well as in bare fact? Sir Lucius thought so, and was prepared to act upon his conviction. With this intent he sought Maud.

Now girls are so often accused of angling for men—accusations not, perhaps, invariably calumnious—that when a man plays the part of angler, his strategy has at least the merit of surprise. Maud was surprised when her cousin, whose preference of late for her society she had attributed in part to cousinly regard, and in part also to the fact that Llosthuel Court was but a dull countryhouse in a dull neighbourhood, came to her and said:

"It's no use mincing matters. If it wasn't for your sake, Maud, what on earth do you imagine could keep a man in such a dungeon as this house of my mother's here? Or what could he find to do, unless indeed he jumped over the cliff and made an end of it?"

"I am afraid you do find it a little dull," answered Maud, with innocent hypocrisy. She began to be afraid that her kinsman meant to say something—something that would necessitate a serious answer—and she thought no harm if, by that verbal fencing

in which the daughters of Eve excel, she could prevent the dreaded word from being spoken. A proposal from Sir Lucius was the very last thing in the world that she wished to hear. But Sir Lucius did not intend to allow himself to be put off by young lady-like parries of this sort.

"Dull!" he said. "If it wasn't for you, Maud, I'd cut my throat, or ship on board the first vessel bound for anywhere, that would take a good-for-nothing like myself before the mast; I would indeed."

It was not a happy hit. Something of a smile flickered about the corners of Maud's pretty mouth, as she pictured to herself the skipper who should be injudicious enough to take this white-handed, selfish Sybarite as a sailor on board his ship; and it may be that the contrast between the baronet's

feline nature and Hugh's simple manliness suggested itself as an echo of the words. The baronet saw the smile, and it nettled him.

"Upon my word, Maud," he said, "you are hard upon a fellow. I do feel as if you owed me something for keeping me here all this time."

"I—I keep you here! I do not understand," faltered Maud. It was coming then. She could not prevent it now. In the whirl and turmoil of London society it is hard to fan a declaration into flame, and easy to snuff it out; but at Llosthuel Court things were different.

"Come, dearest," said Sir Lucius, trying to take Maud's hand, "there ought to be no nonsense between us two. You must know; you can't help seeing how fond I am of you, or——"

"Cousin, you are laughing at me, or you are very much mistaken," interrupted Maud, drawing back her hand.

"Laughing, hey?" said the baronet, in an injured tone. "To me, at any rate, my dear, it is no laughing matter. Here have I been moping——"

"Upon my word, Cousin Lucius, you are very polite to tell me how weary you are of my society," said Maud, trying to turn the affair into a jest.

"No; but of everything except your society, Maud love," said Sir Lucius, coming nearer, and speaking in the most insinuating tone that his practised voice could command. "I'm no great speech-maker, I

know, and fine language is not much in fashion now-a-days; but, if you like it, Maud, I'll go down on one knee, as they do on the stage, to tell you how much I love you, and how I long to call you my wife."

He was a handsome young fellow, in his way, this impecunious baronet, and had a pleasant smile, and fine eyes that shone pleasantly too, when the lurking devil that harboured there kept hidden for awhile; but his fascination of look and manner, and the plausible accents of his voice, were thrown away upon Maud Stanhope.

"Cousin Lucius," said she, gently, but firmly, "I am sorry to give you pain by my refusal, but I have no choice—you have left me no choice—but to answer your proposal plainly, and I must say 'No' at once. It is better that there should be an end of such an idea for ever."

- "You don't mean it, Maud?" said Sir Lucius, half incredulous. "You only say it to tease me, or because it is pretty and missyish to say 'No' before you say 'Yes."
- "There is nothing missyish about me, if the word implies insincerity or affectation, cousin, as I think you ought to know," answered Maud, with perfect steadiness; "and I do mean what I said just now, I assure you."
- "Come, come, my love, this is too bad!" exclaimed Sir Lucius, not only startled and annoyed, but reproachful too. "You know we two were always meant to come together; that all the family planned it—even before my first somewhat unfortunate alli-

ance—and had counted upon our marrying as an event quite certain to come off some day. I've always felt myself that you and no one else belonged to me, Maud dear."

It was not altogether a judicious speech. It may not be quite politic for a suitor to tell a high-spirited maiden that she has really no choice in the matter, and that her acceptance of him is, for family reasons, a foregone conclusion. Maud's colour rose, and her tone was cold, and almost sarcastic as she replied:

"Either you are under a delusion, Lucius, or some one has been kinder and more thoughtful on my behalf than I knew of, since it seems that my destiny has been decided without my being consulted on the subject. I, at any rate, do not at all feel as

if I belonged to you; and, if you please, you will consider the answer, which I was compelled to give you just now, as a final one."

As she spoke she rose from her chair.

"You are angry with me, Maud," said the baronet, bitterly; "but, on my word, it is I——"

"No, not angry," she said, interrupting him; but, as she spoke, she was gone.

Sir Lucius looked after the girl until the door closed, an ugly frown upon his face.

"I'll bring you to your senses yet, my lady!" he muttered between his sharp white teeth, as he ground them together.

He sat still for a few moments, and then, rising in his turn, went straight to the Dowager's study. Lady Larpent, who was going through the neatly arranged columns of an account-book, pen in hand, laid down the pen as she saw the unusual signs of agitation on her son's face.

- "Anything wrong, Lucius?" she asked.
- "Yes, there is," returned the baronet, throwing himself into a chair, and irritably tossing back the dark hair from his forehead. "Maud has treated me ill, mother—confoundedly ill. It's no secret, I believe, that I care very much about her, and that sort of thing. Well, I have asked her to be my wife, and she has given me my dismissal, by Jove! as if I'd been a lackey."
- "You should not take 'No' for an answer so easily," said the Dowager, knitting her brows.
  - "Not such a fool as that," returned the

baronet. "The more I pressed her, though, the more she got on her high horse, until at last she swept out of the room like a tragedy queen. I feel it, I can tell you. And it's a shame, mother, an intolerable shame!"

Sir Lucius not merely spoke in the tone of an injured man, but he really did feel a sense of injury. In the set he lived with, marrying was seldom spoken of except as an act of self-sacrifice, on the man's part at least, which was to be classed as generous or foolish according to circumstances. And he did feel as if, in proposing to Maud so recently, he had done a very handsome, and, indeed, chivalrous thing, which deserved a becoming recognition on the part of the young lady. Maud Stanhope had not looked at this in a proper light, and

Sir Lucius was almost honest in his indignation against the cavalier treatment with which his liberality had been met.

The Dowager only half sympathized with her son's very evident annoyance. She was of the old school, and he of the new. In that early day, when she had formed her fixed ideas as to the fitness of things, women were accustomed to regard themselves as the sought instead of the seekers, and young gentlemen of high pretensions as to rank or wealth had not as yet learned to stand on the defensive against fair candidates for matrimony. But she knew that matters of this sort had altered very much, and she could almost understand that her son had customary and fashionable grounds for his present state of irritation. He was perhaps the poorest of poor baronets—an

assertion not to be unreservedly made, for there are many members of our strange hereditary knighthood who are grievously out at elbows—but then it rested with her to make him rich. And he had a coronet in prospect; for would he not be Lord Penrith, when the present baron, his uncle and Maud's, should die? And Maud's dowry would be splendid, and her prospects grand.

"I will speak to dear Maud," said the Dowager, after a brief consultation with her weighty brows. "She is the best girl in the world, the dearest and truest. She knows I am her friend, and have her welfare at heart. Leave it all to me. Wait and hope, Lucius—wait and hope!"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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